

## **“Buckle Your Seatbelts!” (Revelation 6:1-17)**

*Early Edition* was a popular television program in the early 1990’s that featured a young man that regularly received the next day’s newspaper a day ahead of time. Because he always knew the future, the man’s task in each episode was to save people from a tragedy or problem he had read about in tomorrow’s newspaper. So, if he knew a building was going to burn, he tried to keep people from entering into it. Or if someone was going to be hurt by an act of violence, or in an accident, he tried to prevent the encounter from taking place.<sup>1</sup>

Most of us would like to have the knowledge that this man did. Yet, we fail to realize that the book of Revelation is an “early edition” of future events. Now we have arrived at Revelation 6. Revelation 6-18 deals with a seven-year period called “the tribulation” (Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14).<sup>2</sup> This section makes up almost two-thirds of the book of Revelation. This should cause us to stop and ask, “Is Revelation relevant? If so, why should we spend time studying the tribulation period when we believe (or hope and pray) that we will be raptured prior to this time?”

Studying the tribulation serves several important purposes: (1) The tribulation should scare the living daylights out of us. God’s holiness, as expressed through His justice and wrath, should overwhelm us. It should spark a newfound appreciation for His love and grace. (2) The tribulation should also sober us. It should lead us to take our lives more seriously and to live them according to eternal values. As a result, we will not put so much attachment upon the things of this earth, once we see what will become of them. We will also live more thoughtfully for eternity, finding our source and satisfaction in God. (3) The tribulation should compel us to go out into our world as ambassadors for Jesus Christ, delivering people from the wrath to come.<sup>3</sup> Believe me when I say that no human being will want to go through this time. If all of these terrifying events don’t cause us to tell others about Jesus Christ, what will?

**1. Jesus will sovereignly judge this world (6:1-8).** The first four seals seem to belong together (6:1-8). (1) They are introduced by one of the four living creatures (6:1, 3, 5, 7). (2) Each seal is preceded with a call to **“Come.”** (3) Each seal contains the image of a horse and rider (6:2, 4, 5, 8).<sup>4</sup> (4) In each of the seals there is a progression of meaning given for each of the four seals: conquering, making war, famine, and death. (5) Each of these seals is opened by the Lamb, Jesus Christ. (6) Each seal is given its authority by Christ (“and to him was granted...”). John sees the whole process of judgment under the control of God. The conqueror has only what Almighty God allows him to have. God is completely sovereign so His people do not need to be dismayed.<sup>5</sup> The fifth and sixth seals seem to be distinct (6:9-11, 12-17) and the seventh seal introduces the trumpet judgments (8:1).<sup>6</sup>

**The First Seal (6:1-2):** “Then I saw<sup>7</sup> when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come.’ I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.” John was an eyewitness of this revelation that came to him as action scenes in a film rather than as words from the pages of a book. When the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals on the scroll that He had taken from God, one of the four creatures (cf. Rev 4:6-7) called out with a voice of thunder. The **“voice of thunder”** is symbolic of judgment, as a coming storm. It is a voice of terror, majesty, and judgment! The command given is, **“Come.”** This was probably an invitation to the first horseman rather than to John or to Christ. The angel gave this command four times (6:1, 3, 5, 7), and each time a horseman on a horse came forth. In 6:2, a rider came riding on a white horse with a bow and a crown for the purpose of conquering.

This verse does not say who rides this “**white horse.**”<sup>8</sup> However, it is most likely the coming Antichrist (Dan 9:26-27; 1 Thess 5:3).<sup>9</sup> This rider represents a conquering power that no one can resist (cf. Matt 24:3-6). This person has the semblance of Christ but he is not Christ (cf. Rev 19:11-19). He comes as a deceiver.<sup>10</sup>

The horse was considered a war machine in biblical times.<sup>11</sup> “**White**” symbolizes righteousness and holiness.<sup>12</sup> The bow, mentioned without reference to arrows, does not intimate, as many suggest, that the rider is engaged in “peaceful conquest” by diplomacy and without bloodshed. For it is common in the Scriptures for the bow, as a symbol of hunting or of warfare, to be mentioned alone and still to symbolize violent conquest (e.g., Isa 41:2). This is analogous to frequent references in Western America to riders going forth with rifles, without mention of bullets. The bullets—and likewise the arrows—are assumed.<sup>13</sup> He also has a “**crown.**”<sup>14</sup> Evidently, God gave him this crown.<sup>15</sup> The sovereign God is the only One who can give rulers authority to rule (cf. Rom 13:1). This crown represents his world dictatorship.

At this point, I should mention that although the Antichrist’s reign includes war, it also includes peace. Peace is a buzzword today. Many of the world’s greatest thinkers speak of the need of a one-world government—a new world order. The Antichrist will camp on this and make “peace” his campaign message. Of course the world will buy in, which will allow him to be enthroned on earth as a “god” and political leader.

A number of years ago, the newspapers carried a story of a woman in Fayetteville, Arkansas, who named the United Nations as the beneficiary of her \$700,000 estate, “in the fervent hope that this relatively small contribution may be of some effect in bringing about universal peace on earth and good will among men.” Upon reading this account, J. Vernon McGee, the well-known radio preacher, commented, “[That woman] poured [her] money down a rat hole,” because you cannot buy peace with \$700,000 or even \$700 trillion.<sup>16</sup> Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is the only way to find peace.

**The second seal (6:3-4):** When the Lamb broke the second seal on the scroll John heard the second living creature order the second horseman forward. The red horse probably symbolizes bloodshed and war. The rider of this horse removes “**peace from the earth.**” Further, he was to cause men to “**slay [lit. slaughter] one another.**” The “**great sword**” represents authority to slay people.<sup>17</sup> It does not denote international warfare but revolution in which people turn on one another.<sup>18</sup> The result is anarchy, riot, and civil war. In light of the terrorism, bombings, and civil war taking place around the world, we need little imagination to think of what will be happening on an even larger scale.

It has always been so throughout history. From 1496 B.C. to A.D. 1861, the world knew 3,130 years of war and 227 years of peace. In the last 400 years European nations have signed more than 8,000 peace treaties. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century 8.5 million died in World War I, and 22 million died in World War II. The Vietnam conflict cost the U.S. 47,000 of our young men and maimed another 100,000 for life. What our text tells us is that in the years just prior to the second coming of Christ, God is going to give civilization over to war (cf. Rom 1:24, 26, 28).<sup>19</sup>

**The third seal (6:5-6):** A black horse followed, symbolizing the ravage of war, namely famine. Black is the color of frightfulness and mourning. This third horseman carries in his hand a pair of scales that symbolize his work. These scales in the hand of the horseman are not the kind used by *Weight Watchers*, but rather is the kind of used to measure out grain. This implies that food will have to be weighed out and rationed with care.<sup>20</sup> As is generally true, scarcity and famine follow war.<sup>21</sup>

Probably the wars that the ungodly rulers under Antichrist's leadership begin will reduce the food supply greatly. These rulers will control it strictly with consequent suffering for many people (cf. Luke 21:11). The price of wheat and barley will be very high. A quart of wheat would provide one meal but it would cost a denarius, a whole day's wages. **"Do not damage the oil and the wine"** means "do not tamper with," reflecting the strict control over prices that ungodly rulers, under Antichrist's leadership, will have at this time. The poor would have little money left over for oil, for fuel and health needs, and for wine to drink (cf. Ezek 4:16-17). An inescapable outcome of war is starvation. Worldwide inflation destroys the world economy. Worldwide famine causes great shortages and inflation. Panic in the market causes people to stampede the marketplace to sell their stock. A worldwide depression will make people panic over bread-and-butter issues.<sup>22</sup> The causes of the famine were not extremely severe, since they killed the wheat and barley, but not the vines and olive trees whose roots go deeper. As the tribulation grows worse, the rich as well as the poor will suffer, but at this early stage the poor will suffer more than the rich.

The fact that the voice announcing the prices comes from the living creatures that are in the middle of and around God's throne (Rev 4:6) suggests that God has something to do with price lists. When we watch prices go up and down, and when we hear the weather reports and crop reports, and when we listen to the latest stock prices and economic indicators, we never think of anything divine connected with them. How wrong we are!

The thought is that there will be an abundance of such things as expensive foodstuffs, toiletries, beauty aids and conditioners ("oil"), and liquor ("wine"), but a scarcity for the poor of essential foodstuffs. We take food in our cupboards for granted. We let the waitress take potential leftovers away. We toss out half-eaten apples. In America, we have forgotten the old "waste not, want not" homily. We throw enough food in our garbage cans to feed a family of six, for a day, in India. Our dogs have a diet higher in protein than most of the people in the world.<sup>23</sup>

**The fourth seal (6:7-8): "When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come.' I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth."**

The Lamb broke the fourth seal, and the fourth living creature called the fourth horseman out. John next saw an ashen horse the color of a human corpse. The Greek term for **"ashen"** (*chloros*) is the one from which we get our English word chlorine. It denotes a yellowish-green color as of a human corpse.<sup>24</sup> Presumably, Antichrist, the cause of this death, is the rider since his name is **"Death."** Following on his heels is **"Hades"** which is the destination of the souls that do not know Christ as Savior (cf. Luke 16:23).<sup>25</sup> Perhaps John saw Hades following death as a man on foot follows a mounted warrior grimly gathering in his victims, or as a hearse follows a horse.<sup>26</sup> The mention of Hades following with him leaves no doubt that those who are slain will be unsaved people who will be cast into hell until they stand before the great white throne judgment (Rev 20:11-15). As John has already announced (Rev 1:18), Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades. As horrible as they are, their power is limited to what Christ permits; they too were **"given"** their authority.

God gives these enemies authority to take one-fourth of the world's population. This is approximately 1.5 billion. This is more than the population of China and the United States combined. This is the greatest destruction of human life recorded in history. This evidently is the total number that will die as a result of all the catastrophes predicted so far. The causes of death will be slaughter (the second rider), hunger (the third rider), pestilence or plague, and wild beasts. These catastrophes are war, the resulting famine, and disease. Attacks by wild animals will also contribute to the death rate.<sup>27</sup> When we compare these

predicates with Ezekiel 14:21 (cf. 1 Kgs 8:33-39; 1 Chron 21:12), we realize that this is a listing of covenantal curses instituted when the people of Israel fall into idolatry.

**2. Jesus will righteously avenge His people (6:9-11).** Earlier, John had seen a throne room in heaven (Rev 4-5), but now he sees a temple.<sup>28</sup> In this temple, there is an altar. This altar was evidently an altar of sacrifice rather than an incense altar (cf. Rev 5:8; 8:3-5; 14:17-18). Under this altar were the souls of people who had died for their faith in God and their faithfulness to Him during the first four seals period just described (6:3-8; i.e., in the tribulation so far; cf. Matt 24:9, 13-14; Luke 21:11).<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the idea is that the lives of these martyrs were sacrifices to God.<sup>30</sup> These faithful believers had been slain for their faith. John did not see their resurrected bodies because God had not yet resurrected them (see Rev 20:4).<sup>31</sup> John sees these martyrs very much alive. Men may destroy our bodies, but they cannot kill the soul or the person who indwells the body, the house for the person. At death, the soul of the person goes to be with the Lord (Phil 1:21-22; 2 Cor 5:6-8). The body “sleeps” but the soul of the person is conscious, awake. These believers were **“slain.”** This was a sacrificial term used for the slaughtering of animals for sacrifice. The emphasis seems to be on the fact they were not just killed, but slaughtered.

Jesus now opens the fifth seal and John sees, **“underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained.”** These martyrs **“cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord,<sup>32</sup> holy and true,<sup>33</sup> will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’”<sup>34</sup>**

In 6:11, John states, **“there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest<sup>35</sup> for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.”** In 6:10, John saw these martyrs calling out to their heavenly Master (Gk. *despotes*) to punish their murderers. **“Master”** implies divine might, majesty, power, and authority, and it stresses the absolute power of God. How much longer did they have to wait for God to avenge them? (cf. Ps 79:10; 94:3; Hab 1:2). “Those who dwell on the earth” is almost a technical expression in Revelation describing unbelievers who are hostile to God.<sup>36</sup> Contrast the prayers of Jesus (Luke 23:24) and Stephen (Acts 7:60) in which they asked God to be merciful to their murderers. The difference is that the time of God’s longsuffering has now ended and He has begun to pour out His wrath on sinners. Their prayers for revenge upon their enemies are viewed as the fifth judgment against the earth-dwellers. This is not a cry for revenge, but for God’s justice and righteousness to prevail on earth against the sin and the atrocities of man, in rebellion to God (Rom 12:19). As in the disciples’ prayer, “Your kingdom come,” they are praying for the second coming which ushers in God’s righteous and just reign on earth.

Each martyr received a long, white robe. Although many white-clothed beings appear in Revelation, the only ones specifically said to have a white **“robe”<sup>37</sup>** are the tribulation martyrs. They had been faithful and had suffered martyrdom for their fidelity to Christ (cf. Rev 3:5; 7:9, 14). God told these martyrs to be patient. More people would experience martyrdom before it would be God’s time for Jesus Christ to return to the earth and judge their living adversaries.

Apparently, religious persecution breaks out in the land of Israel. We would expect when the abomination of desolation occurs, there will be faithful messianic Jewish believers who will resist his pretensions. John sees the results of this persecution by the Man of Sin in Revelation 6:9. God will avenge the death of Christian martyrs at the right time and will give them special honor (Ps 116:15). In the meantime, we must pray for those who will be martyred.

**3. Jesus will radically alter His creation (6:12-17).** In 6:12-17, the scene shifts back to earth as Jesus opens the sixth seal. In 6:12-14, John tells us that the earth will be affected by six cosmic catastrophes. In these three verses, God shakes the universe like a rag doll. As a result, the entire world will know that there is a God. They will also know that His divine wrath is unleashed against their rebellion.<sup>38</sup> The first catastrophe that Jesus brings is a “**great earthquake**”<sup>39</sup> that will rock the whole world (cf. Luke 21:11).<sup>40</sup> In 6:14, John writes, “**every mountain and island were moved out of their places.**”<sup>41</sup> This is frightening! Then the sun will become “**black as sackcloth made of hair.**” “**Sackcloth**” was a very rough cloth made from the hair of a black goat and worn in times of mourning and despair (cf. Rev 11:3).<sup>42</sup> The blackening or darkening of the sun as a sign, speaks of God’s judgment and the withdrawal of His longsuffering.<sup>43</sup> It shows this will be a time of great despair for man. What causes this darkening? We are not told; we can only speculate. Perhaps it is caused by the ash, dust, and debris which will fill the sky when the earth begins to quake (6:14). This will undoubtedly cause volcanic eruptions which will make Mount St. Helens look like a hiccup by comparison. When there is a large volcanic eruption, the sun becomes darkened by the substances in the air.

Not only will the sun become black, John tells us “**the whole moon became like blood.**”<sup>44</sup> As a sign, this speaks of the loss of life. How eerie this all will be, to look up at night and see a blood-red moon. Evidently, through the atmospheric changes brought about by the shaking of the earth and the heavens, particles or substances will be in the air which will cause the moon to take on a red cast.

John also says that the stars will be affected. The word “star” (*aster*) is used of any heavenly body seen at night (i.e., stars, planets, asteroids, meteors, etc.).<sup>45</sup> These are not stars as we often use the word, which are huge and often dwarf the earth in size. These are likely meteorites, which are small by comparison to the earth.<sup>46</sup> John compares them to unripe figs falling to earth from a fig tree when shaken by a great wind.

In 6:14, the sky will appear to split and roll back in two opposite directions (cf. Isa 34:4).<sup>47</sup> The universe will seem to be coming apart. Apparently, the opening of the sky will give earth-dwellers a window-like look into heaven where they see the Lord God and the Lamb. Apparently, this lasts for at least one full revolution of the earth so all the world sees this (cf. Rev 6:15).<sup>48</sup>

In 6:15, John provides seven classes of society to stress the universal scope of this judgment. He then tells us that they “**hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and the wrath**<sup>49</sup> **of the Lamb for the great day of their wrath**<sup>50</sup> **has come, and who is able to stand?’” (6:15b-17).** These verses are truly tragic. In the midst of unbelievable suffering, mankind does not pray to God for protection from His wrath.<sup>51</sup> Instead, they cry out to the rocks and the mountains. The inhabitants of the earth will recognize for the first time the source of their trouble,<sup>52</sup> yet they still refuse to respond to God’s wrath. God’s wrath is one of His eternal attributes, the perfect complement to His love. The wrath of God is His necessary and just response to evil (Ps 7:11). God’s wrath is presently being revealed against unbelievers by letting them go their way and face the consequences of their behavior (Rom 1:18-32). However, when the great day of God’s wrath occurs, He will be far more active in the execution of His anger.

At this point, the world poses this question: “As a Christian, aren’t you supposed to be teaching that God is a God of love rather than a God of condemnation?” The inference is somehow you are being unloving by reminding people of God’s holiness and intolerance of sin. Suppose I tell my daughter, Jena, that if she sticks her finger into an electrical outlet she will die. Am I being judgmental or loving? Warning

people of inevitable consequences of sin is the most loving thing we can do, especially if it leads them to make the right choice.<sup>53</sup>

I acknowledge that it is not pleasant to read about the carrying out of God's judgment on the world. There are many questions surrounding God's activity and His purpose in all this. It all seems so terrible.<sup>54</sup> Why would God do these things, which cause such misery and pain? There are several reasons but three should suffice: (1) God wants to bring people to repentance. (2) God wants to demonstrate His patience. (3) God wants to establish His justice.

Some lessons and applications may be drawn from this study: (1) *Our passage teaches the absolute sovereignty of God.* The four riders are given their authority from heaven. Everything they do is directed and limited by Almighty God and the Lamb. God's people have nothing to fear from Antichrist, for the Lamb is their Lord. (2) *The four seals demonstrate the self-defeating character of sin.* Antichrist shows us in a graphic way the spirit of self-aggrandizement that is one of the fruits of sin. All God needs to do is let events take their course and sinners will inevitably be punished. (3) *Christ's work includes not only redemption but also judgment.* Those who will not embrace the Lamb as redeemer, and share with Him the inheritance of the kingdom of God, will themselves be embraced by death and hades and dwell in the kingdom of the dead. (4) *In this passage Almighty God reveals what this vain, proud, and guilty world is coming to.* Our civilization shall one day expire under the Antichrist. The immediate future, therefore, holds not peace but judgment.

Harry Truman was the caretaker of a recreation lodge on Spirit Lake, five miles north of Mt. St. Helens' smoke-enshrouded peak, in Oregon. Harry had been warned by rangers and neighbors that the mountain was going to blow up. Geologists had been watching their seismographs for some time, and the evidence predicted that the volcano would soon explode with such a fury that it would flatten the surrounding forest.

Warnings blared from loudspeakers on patrol cars and helicopters, and blinked from battery-powered signs at every major crossroad. Radio and television announcers pled with their audiences to flee to safety. Harry Truman ignored them all. He grinned on national television and said, "Nobody knows more about this mountain than Harry, and it don't dare blow up on him."

On May 18, 1980, at 8:31 A. M., the mountain exploded. I cannot help wondering if Harry regretted his decision, in the millisecond he had before the concussive waves, traveling faster than the speed of sound, flattened him and everything else for 150 square miles. Did he have time to mourn his stubbornness as millions of tons of rock disintegrated and disappeared into a cloud reaching ten miles into the sky? Did he have second thoughts as the wall of mud and ash 50 feet high buried his cabin, his cats, and his freshly mowed lawn, or had he been vaporized when the mountain erupted with a force 500 times greater than the nuclear bomb that had leveled Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945?

Harry Truman is now a legend in Oregon. In gift shops he smiles down on customers from posters, T-shirts, and beer mugs. There is even a song about old Harry, the stubborn man who put his ear to the mountain but would not heed the warnings.<sup>55</sup>

The question that faces each reader today is this: How do you stand in relation to the Lamb who breaks the seals? Are you a Christian? Then you will be kept from "the hour" of tribulation (Rev 3:10). Our Lord's counsel to you is, "Be on the alert" (Matt 25:13) and "Abide in Me" (John 15:4). Keep yourself in fellowship with Him. Be thankful that judgment for you is passed. No divine wrath remains for you. Are you not a Christian? There is only one way to escape the judgment of the Lamb who breaks the seals. Trust in His death.

## **Addendum: The Doctrine of the Tribulation (Revelation 6-18)**

**The Definition of the Tribulation:** The word “tribulation” (*thilipsis*) is a general term used to describe any kind of testing, affliction or distress. It frequently refers to the church and her trials in this world (e.g., Acts 11:19; Rom 5:3; Rev 1:9). But the word “tribulation” also refers to a future time of trouble that will come upon the entire world (Matt 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; Rev 7:14). This Tribulation will be unprecedented in its affliction, and will culminate with the personal return of Jesus Christ to earth (Rev 19:11-21).

**The Time of the Tribulation:** The Tribulation occurs after the removal of the church (1 Thess 4:13-18; 5:1-9) and is followed by the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ (Rev 20:1-4). It is during this period (i.e., the Millennium) that Christ defeats His enemies and establishes His right to rule on earth (Rev 4-5; 11:15-18).

**The Length of the Tribulation:** Daniel 9:24-27 teaches us that the Tribulation (Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week) consists of seven years. This is further verified by the time periods of Revelation, which divide the Tribulation into two periods of three and one-half years (Rev 11:2-3; 13:5; 12:6; Dan 7:25; Rev 12:14).

### **The Purposes of the Tribulation:**

1. To discipline Israel for her stubborn rejection of Christ and bring the nation to faith in Christ (Zech 12:10; Matt 23:37-39). This prepares her for restoration and regathering for the Millennium (Jer 30:1-17; Ezek 20:33-38).
2. To judge the Gentile nations for their wickedness and rejection of Jesus Christ (Zeph 1:15, 17, 18; Joel 3:12-14; Rev 6:16-17). The Tribulation will also be used to bring many Gentiles to faith in Christ (Matt 24:14; Rev 7:9; 13:10).
3. To reveal the true character and agenda of Satan. The Tribulation will permit Satan’s program to come to its logical conclusion resulting in God’s judgment. It will demonstrate that Satan is the cause of war, murder, and deception, and that he deserves God’s judgment (Isa 14:12-17; Ezek 28:12-19; Matt 25:41; Rev 12:7-12; 20:1-3).
4. To demonstrate that God is holy (Rev 4:8; 6:10), righteous (Rev 15:3-4), just (Rom 3:26; 1 Pet 3:18), patient (2 Pet 3:9), and still on the throne (Rev 4:1:1-11).

### **The Names of the Tribulation:**

1. The indignation (Isa 26:20; 34:2)
2. A day of (God’s) vengeance (Isa 34:8; 63:1-6)
3. Jacob’s trouble or distress (Jer 30:7)
4. Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week (Dan 9:24-27)
5. A time of trouble or distress (Dan 12:1)
6. The end time (Dan 12:9)
7. The day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1; 1 Thess 5:2)
8. Tribulation and the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; Rev 7:14)
9. The hour of testing...to test those who dwell on the earth (Rev 3:10)
10. The great day of their (i.e., the Father and the Lamb) wrath (Rev 6:17)
11. Hour of His judgment (Rev 14:7)

**The Nature of the Tribulation:**

1. It is a time of unprecedented trouble (Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:14-18; Matt 24:21).
2. It is a time of God’s wrath or indignation and the vindication of God’s holiness (Zeph 1:15, 18; Rev 6:17; 1 Thess 1:10; Rev 14:7, 10; 19:2). God’s wrath against man’s sin and rebellion will be withheld no longer.
3. It is a day of utter darkness, gloom and extreme cloudiness (Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15).
4. It is a day of destruction and global catastrophes (Joel 1:15; 2:3; 1 Thess 5:3; Rev 6-19).
5. It is a day of extreme lawlessness, sin and demonic activity (Rev 9:20-21; 2 Thess 2:12).
6. It is a day of extreme deception and delusion (2 Thess 2:9-12; Rev 9:1f; 13:2-3, 11-18; Dan 8:24f). This deception is caused by a number of factors: (a) the removal of the Spirit indwelt church with its restraining influence (2 Thess 2:6-8), (b) the increase of demonic activity (2 Thess 2:8-10), and (c) the blinding judgment of God (2 Thess 2:11-12).
7. It is a time of death (Rev 6:3-11; 9:15, 18; 11:13). Large portions of the populations of the earth will be wiped out suddenly, both human and animal.
8. It is a time of utter negative volition, cold indifference, and rebellion against God even though the world will know it is under the wrath of God (Rev 6:14-17; 9:20; 11:10, 18).
9. It is a time of internationalism religiously (Rev 17), politically (Rev 13, 17), economically (Rev 18), and militarily (Joel 3:2, 9-14; Rev 17).
10. It is a time of extreme Anti-Semitism (Rev 12; Matt 24:9, 13f).
11. It is a time of unprecedented apostasy and blasphemy against God (Rev 11:1f; 13:1f; 2 Thess 2:3f).
12. It is a time of the martyrdom of believers, both Jew and Gentile (Rev 6:9; 7:14f).
13. It is a time of global and universal war, human and angelic (Rev 6: 2-4; 16:14; 19:14f; Joel 3:2, 9f; Rev 12:7).
14. But it is also a time of unprecedented evangelism (Rev 7:9; Matt 24:14). Note: The following 14 points are from my friend, Hampton Keathley III, now in the presence of Jesus (2 Cor 5:6-8).

**The Chronology of the Tribulation:** The following charts provide a simplified glance at the Tribulation judgments in Revelation.

<i>The Parallels Between Matthew 24 and Revelation 6</i>		
<b>Conditions</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Revelation 6</b>
False Christs	24:4-5	6:1-2
Warfare	24:6-8	6:3-4
Famine	24:7	6:5-6
Death	24:7-10	6:7-8
Witnessing	24:14	6:9-11
Cosmic changes	24:29	6:12-17

<b>The Seals (Revelation 6:1-8:6)</b>	
1. Antichrist (6:2)	5. Martyrdom (6:9-11)
2. War (6:4)	6. Global Destruction (6:12-17)
3. Famine (6:6)	7. The trumpet judgments begin (8:1)
4. Death (6:8)	

<b>The Trumpets (Revelation 8:7-9:21)</b>	
1. A third of the world's vegetation destroyed (8:7)	5. Terrible locusts (9:1)
2. A third of the world's sea judged (8:8)	6. A third of mankind killed (9:13)
3. A third of the world's fresh water poisoned (8:10)	7. The bowl judgments begin (16:1)
4. A third of the heavens darkened (8:12)	

<b>The Bowls (Revelation 16:1-17)</b>	
1. Ugly sores (16:2)	5. Darkness and pain (16:10)
2. Sea turned to blood (16:3)	6. Demonic hordes (16:12)
3. Fresh water turned to blood (16:4)	7. Greatest earthquake and widespread destruction (16:17)
4. Unbearable heat (16:8)	

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tony Evans, *The Best is Yet to Come* (Chicago: Moody, 2000), 15.

<sup>2</sup> The tribulation period is made up of seven seals (6:1-17; 8:1), seven trumpets (8:7-9:21; 11:15), and seven bowls (16:1-19:2). All 21 judgments are revealed chronologically and cover the seven-year period of tribulation.

<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock suggests four other reasons to study the tribulation: (1) All Scripture is important and worthy of our careful study and application to our lives (2 Tim 3:16-17). (2) We learn a great deal about the nature of man, God, and Satan. (3) As we see the signs of the coming tribulation developing before our eyes, it fills us with hope and expectation that the Lord's coming is near. (4) Though we won't live through the Tribulation if we know the Savior, the Lord loves to take His own people into His confidence and tell them what is going to happen even if it doesn't directly affect their own lives. Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to the Most Asked Questions about the End Times* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 168-169.

<sup>4</sup> The first four seal judgments involve riders riding horses of various colors. This imagery recalls Zechariah 1:8 and 6:1-8. However the horses and horsemen in Revelation evidently represent something different from those in Zechariah as comparison of these texts suggests.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: TNTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 102, 104.

<sup>6</sup> The seventh seal is separated from the previous six by the parenthetical events of Rev 7.

<sup>7</sup> "Then I saw" (*kai eidon*, cf. Rev 5:1, 2, 6, 11) marks the continuation of what John had seen that Rev 4 and 5 record, but also the commencement of revelation concerning future events on earth.

<sup>8</sup> There have been several other interpretations that have enjoyed some popularity through the centuries. These include a Roman emperor, the Parthian invasion of the Roman Empire, the Word of God, a personification of judgment, the victorious spread of the Gospel, warfare in general, triumphant militarism, the personification of ungodly movements, and Jesus Christ. Whew!

<sup>9</sup> The view that the first horseman is the Antichrist is to be preferred for these reasons: (1) Besides the white horses, the riders in Rev 6 and 19 are different. In Rev 19 our Lord has a sword that characterizes Him as the judge of the church and the world. And He has royal crowns (*diademata*). The rider in Rev 6, however, has a bow and a victor's wreath (*stephanos*). (2) The rider cannot be Christ, because Christ is already symbolized by another figure in the scene, namely, the Lamb. (3) The rider on the white horse is part of a group that brings devastating calamities and destruction upon the earth. It seems unlikely that he would bring good when the others bring woe. The picture here is not of the victory of Christ but of the wrath of God. The Messiah cannot appear before the messianic judgments. A picture of the victorious Christ would be quite out of place in a passage telling of disaster after disaster. Note: The best defense for this rider being Jesus Christ has been put forth by Zane C. Hodges, "The First Horseman of the Apocalypse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:476 (Oct 1962), 324-34. (4) The passage parallel to this one in Matthew 24 indicates that the rider is Antichrist:

<b>Matthew 24 (cf. Mark 13; Luke 21)</b>	<b>Revelation 6</b>
False christs (Matt 24:4-5, 24)	White horse (Rev 6:1-2)
War (Matt 24:6-7)	War (Rev 6:3-4)
Famine (Matt 24:7)	Famine (Rev 6:5-6)
Death (Matt 24:7-9)	Death (Rev 6:7-8)
Pestilence (Luke 21:11)	Pestilence (Rev 6:8)
Martyrdom (Matt 24:9-10, 16-22)	Martyrdom (Rev 6:9-11)
Cosmic catastrophes (Matt 24:29)	Cosmic catastrophes (Rev 6:12-17)

<sup>10</sup> This fits the entire evil picture in Revelation. The satanic powers, and especially the Antichrist, are seen as perverted imitations, or anti-types of God and Christ. There is, for example, a counterfeit trinity (Satan and the two beasts) in Rev 12 and 13. Then there is the contrast between Israel, the mother of Messiah (Rev 12), and Babylon, the mother of harlots (Rev 17-18). This terrible imitation of Christ, this Christ of hell, rides through the events of the tribulation period to meet his anti-type, the rider on the white horse in Rev 19. This second rider on a white horse is the true Ruler and Almighty Judge who will appear at the very end of history.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Job 39:19-25; Ps 76:5-6; Prov 21:31.

<sup>12</sup> It gave an appearance of purity, but that does not necessarily mean the rider was righteous. When men wage war they always pretend to be fighting for righteousness.

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<sup>13</sup> The Antichrist's very rise to power is a violent one, for, as Daniel 7:8 points out, he will conquer three kings as he is on his way from his status as a "little horn" to a horn greater than even the great horn Alexander the Great was in his day. Antichrist will eventually head an eleven-nation federation (cf. Rev 17:9-13). But his victory is only temporary, for Christ will appear and put an end to it (17:14; 19:11-20). See Daniel K. K. Wong, "The First Horseman of Revelation 6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April 1996), 212-26. This the best article on this passage that I've seen.

<sup>14</sup> A crown is the symbol of a commander in chief or a victor. But whom does he seek to conquer? Revelation 13:7-8 says that he seeks to conquer the entire earth. It also says that he especially seeks to conquer "the saints" (13:7, i.e., God's people on earth at that time). The apostle says that he persecutes them (6:9-11; 13:5-10). He also tries to mislead them (i.e., to seduce them with false doctrine, false apostles, indifference, relaxation of faith and love, cf. the warnings to the seven churches in Rev 2-3; also 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rev 9:1, 3, 5; 13:5, 7, 14, 15.

<sup>16</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, 5 vols. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 5:941.

<sup>17</sup> The warfare in view here seems to be what Ezekiel described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 as the battle of Gog and Magog.

<sup>18</sup> The order follows Mark 13:7-8 as wars lead to nation rising up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

<sup>19</sup> David J. MacLeod, "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," *Emmaus Journal* 1:1 (Winter 1991), 14.

<sup>20</sup> Beasley-Murray writes, "The weighing of food is a prophetic announcement of famine." Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation: NCB* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), 132.

<sup>21</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 155.

<sup>22</sup> In Rev 13 the Antichrist will place enormous economic controls on the world. No one will be able to do business without his permission.

<sup>23</sup> David Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night* (Dallas: Word, 1997 [1990]), 118.

<sup>24</sup> BDAG, Electronic Ed. See also Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Death claims the material part of the person and Hades the immaterial part.

<sup>26</sup> "Hades" appears in Revelation four times, always trailing "death" (1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jer 15:2-3; 24:10; 29:17-18; Ezek 5:12, 17; 14:21.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ps 11:4; 18:6; 29:9-10; Isa 6:1; Hab 2:20.

<sup>29</sup> We meet this martyred throne again in Rev 7:9-17 and 20:4, and we learn more about their martyrdom in Rev 13.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6.

<sup>31</sup> Since tribulation saints along with all Old Testament saints are not resurrected until after the Tribulation described by Daniel as "a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time" (cf. Dan 12:1-2 with Rev 20:4), some have suggested that these martyrs are given temporary heavenly bodies. The robes spoken of here and portrayed to John in this vision, however, may simply be the symbol of the fact they are clothed in the righteousness of God as believers in Christ.

<sup>32</sup> These words echo throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 6:3; 13:1-2; 35:17; 74:9-10; Isa 6:11; Jer 47:6; Zech 1:12).

<sup>33</sup> "Holy and true" were attributes of Christ earlier (Rev 3:7), but here the Father is probably in view since He is the source of the judgments.

<sup>34</sup> The Greek uses a present adjectival participle, which characterizes these as "the earth-dwellers," those who have no interest in God, or in spiritual or heavenly things. As mentioned in connection with Rev 3:10, it is practically a technical term for unbelievers who live in rebellion against God.

<sup>35</sup> Gk. *anapauo*. This is a compound verb and is somewhat stronger than simply *pauo*. In the middle voice it means, "to take rest, enjoy a rest." Some believe New Testament Greek has pretty much abandoned the rules of classical Greek, and, therefore, the middle voice has very little significance, if any, in the New Testament Greek. For arguments against this see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 420-21.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Rev 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2, 8.

<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that the white robes (*stole*) granted to these martyrs are special garments and different from the garments (*himation*) offered to the overcomers in Rev 2-3 and worn by the elders who have already appeared in Rev 4-5. The writer makes this distinction to let us know that two groups are under consideration.

<sup>38</sup> Throughout this section, John utilizes well-known Old Testament references and images of the Day of the Lord (see Joel 2:10, 30f., Isa 13:9f., 2:10f., 34:4, Ezek 32:7f., Hosea 10:8).

<sup>39</sup> This is the first of five references to an earthquake (see also Rev 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18).

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<sup>40</sup> Many commentators have taken this description as picturing a metaphorical convulsion among the nations, not a literal shaking of the earth and the heavens. We should probably take them literally for at least two reasons. First, Jesus used the same language in the Olivet Discourse and gave no indication that it was symbolic (cf. Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11). Second, a shaking of the nations follows in Rev 6:15-17.

<sup>41</sup> Literal interpretation does not rule out the use of hyperbole, which appears at this point. If all the mountains moved out of their places, there would be no places for people to seek to hide.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 3:31; Neh 9:1; Dan 9:3; Joel 1:13; Amos 8:10; Jonah 3:5-6, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Isa 13:10; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 31; Amos 8:9; Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20.

<sup>45</sup> Any bright light in the sky was considered to be a star by the ancients.

<sup>46</sup> Revelation 8:8 most likely refers to an asteroid and this to meteorites.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 454.

<sup>48</sup> Hampton Keathley III, *Revelation* (Biblical Studies Press: www.bible.org, 1997), 148.

<sup>49</sup> The word for “wrath” (*orge*) is used in Rev 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15. In all six of these, the explicit reference is the wrath of God or the Lamb.

<sup>50</sup> This “great day of their wrath” is the tribulation, Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan 9:24-27; cf. Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Joel 2:2; Matt 24:21).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Isa 2:19, 21; Hos 10:8; Luke 23:30.

<sup>52</sup> The inhabitants of the earth will recognize for the first time the source of their trouble. Prior to this they will be living their lives as usual. Jesus predicts, “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt 24:37-39).

<sup>53</sup> Robert Jeffress, *As Time Runs Out* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 89.

<sup>54</sup> Whenever the forces of nature run amuck, the natural human responses are to protect self and blame God. What did we do to deserve this? Instead of, “God’s power and greatness are on display through these events.”

<sup>55</sup> The summary of events given here is adapted from Billy Graham, *Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Waco: Word, 1983), 13-14.