

Revelation 6:1-17
“Who is able to stand?”

I. Intro

II. Vs. 1-8 The four horses of judgment

III. Vs. 9-17 Two responses to judgment

I. Intro

The fourth chapter revealed the throne and Him who set upon it. The fifth chapter introduced us to the title deed to the earth and the only One worthy to lose its seals. Both of those chapters dealt with the activity of heaven and the response to that activity which was worship. The raptured church has cast their crowns at His feet in an attitude of surrendered worship and now it is time for those upon the earth to do so as well. Before us is the beginning of the preparations for this and is in judgment that is unleashed upon those who “*refused to love the truth that they might be saved*” (2 Thess. 2:10). This judgment that will last for 19 chapters and conclude with Jesus return to set up His righteous reign. Notably absent for these 19 chapters is the churches presence which will not be brought up until the twenty-second chapter.

II. Vs. 1-8 The four horses of judgment

Several things need to be mentioned as we start this chapter:

1. The judgments recorded here although allowed by God do not proceed from God. In fact, it is not until the seventh seal is opened and the start of the trumpets that we see judgment that originates from heaven.
2. Based upon this evidence, what is recorded here is nothing more than the natural progression of the human race left to its own desires apart from any preserving influence from the Church. In 2 Thess. 2:7-8 Paul wrote that, “*He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with*

the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” The question is, “*What does Paul mean when he says, He who now restrains?*” Jesus told His disciples in Matt. 5:13-14 “*You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.*” In those descriptive terms Jesus clearly reveals the work of His Church under the power of the Holy Spirit as both preserver as well as a revealer. During the tribulation period there will be those who will be saved and as such, sealed by the Holy Spirit but the work of the Holy Spirit through the Church as a restraining influence will no longer be in effect. Furthermore, this exactly fits Jesus’ own prophetic outline of event during the tribulation period:

- A strong deception: Matt. 24:4-5 <> Rev. 6:2
- Followed by war: Matt. 24:6a <> Rev. 6:3-4
- Followed by famine: Matt. 24:7a <> Rev. 6:5-6
- Followed by death: Matt. 24:7b <> Rev. 6:7-8

The white horse of peace

Vs. 1-2 John hears one of the four living creatures tell him to come and see. John seems to be greatly astonished by what he sees. There are three possibilities as to the identification of the first rider is:

- a. **The rider represents the Church that is spreading the gospel:** The reason for this interpretation is because of the color of his horse being white which is usually the color for victory as well as holiness. This coupled with the crown given to him and his seeming victory are the reason given for this interpretation. However, there are many which make this interpretation unlikely.
 1. That which follows this rider’s victory of the gospel is war, famine and death not what you would expect from the gospel.

2. It does not fit the prophetic timetable of Daniel or Mathew 24.
 3. The weapon of the Church would not be a bow but rather a sword which is the word of God according to Eph. 6:17
- b. **The rider is Jesus**: This interpretation is sought because of the fact that in chapter 19:11 we do see Jesus coming on a white horse but that is the end of any similarities between the two riders and there are five objections to this interpretation as well.
1. As above the outcome of His coming as well as the timing of His coming does not fit.
 2. The rider in 6:2 conquers by way of bow whereas Jesus in 19:15 came “*out of His mouth a sharp sword*”. Furthermore, that which follows Jesus in the 19th chapter are the armies of God not war, famine and death.
 3. Jesus does not come in the beginning of the tribulation as we see here but rather at the end as we see in the 19th chapter.
 4. Though this rider has a crown it is a different word then the “*many crowns*” of the 19th chapter. Here the word in Greek means a crown won by being victorious where the word in Greek in the 19th chapter is one worn only by a sovereign King.
 5. Finally, logistically this does not seem to fit as you have Jesus the Lamb of God opening the seal, which then places Him in the seal!
- c. **The rider is the anti-christ**: This fits the time frame of Daniel as well as Mathew 24. In fact, Daniel referred to the anti-christ as “*the prince who is to come and as the little horn*” (9:26-27, 7:8,21-22), which will uproot the ten-horn confederacy of the revived Roman empire by speaking great words and prevailing against the saints for a time until the Ancient of Days comes and judges. The fact that this rider is on a white

horse with a crown fits Jesus words in Matthew 24:4-8 as he will come with great deception that according to 2 Thess. 2:11 the people will believe the lie. Notice that no arrows are mentioned accompanying the bow that the rider carries and yet still he will be a leader by way of strength.

The Red Horse of war

Vs. 3-4 As John opens the 2nd seal he hears yet another living creature saying “*come and see*” then sees a horse fiery red. Later on, in this book in chapter 12:3 then again in chapter 17:3 the devil is associated with this “*fiery red*” color which is the color of terror and death, fitting as Jesus called him a “murderer” in John 8:44. This fits the prophetic timetable as well as Paul explains to the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 5:3 saying that “*they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*” It seems as though the first 3 ½ years satan will be riding the “*white horse*” conquering to conquer then switch to the “*fiery red*” one at the midpoint of the tribulation and take the peace he brought about during the first 3 ½ years from the earth. Notice what “taking the peace” does as John says “*that people should kill one another*”. ***Once the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit’s work is removed with the Church then people will act based upon their own feelings.*** James says as much in 4:1-2 as he asks the rhetorical question “*Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.*”

The black horse of famine

Vs. 5-6 Black in the bible is the symbolic color of famine (Lam 5:10). Throughout history you will always see that famine always follows war. The pair of scales John sees shows the scarcity

as food will have to be rationed. A day's wage will purchase only enough wheat for one person's meal a day and only enough barley for three meals for one person. Yet verse 6 also indicates that there will be oil and wine available which suggests that the famine will not be based upon scarcity of product but rather on scarcity of money as a huge class distinction between the poor and wealthy will arise.

The pale horse of death

Vs. 7-8 Pale is the color of putrid green, which is the color of death, notice that the rider is called Hades and death, hardly what you would expect of the white horse rider was either the Church or Jesus! Interesting to note that in Rev. 1:18 and again in 20:14 we see it is Jesus alone who has the keys of Hades and death as well as the power to cast both into the lake of fire. The power that this rider has is given but look as well at the name of this rider is "death" and Hades followed with him. I believe that this is a reference to the antichrist and satan whom he will drive his authority from. The power given them will have specific limitations and will be seen in a fourfold manner of death.

- a. First we are told that their destructive effect will be over only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth. To put that in perspective there are currently around 6 billion people on this earth thus $1\frac{1}{2}$ billion people will die in one of these four ways listed below. That would currently be the population of China, U.S. and Indonesia, which are the top three populations in the world. In World War 2 the combined loss of life both of military and civilian was 51 million so just multiply that by 30.
- b. Second, the fourfold manner of death is sword, hunger, death, or pestilence and the beasts of the earth. There will be complete chaos upon the earth during this time. Yet it is important to realize that all that is happening is that **God has removed the**

restraint which has given way to mankind get what they have so longed for a world without the influence of the Living God. The world will be free to pursue any and every lust without any moral or apparently legal restraint. The 60's sang of this time as the "*dawning of the age of Aquarius*" where new enlightenment would produce a society unhindered by the bondage of Christianity free to experience all that their minds can achieve. Here then is what John has recorded of the world's achievement.

III. Vs. 9-17 Two responses to judgment

In the 5th and 6th seals we are given two responses of mankind as the loosening of the first four seals. It is interesting to see this, as they are the same two responses of people today concerning the truth about Jesus.

Vs. 9-11 The identification of these martyrs is best understood by two things:

- a. When they appear, which is after the fourth seal which indicates that they have come from the tribulation period.
- b. What they cry out, which is for the Lord to avenge their blood, which had been shed by those who dwell on earth.

What are we to make of these martyred believers being under the altar? Well in the O.T. we are told that the priest would pour out the blood or life of the sacrifice at the base of the altar showing the giving of life for the glory of God. So too these believers as they have been shown what Heb. 11:38 says that "*the world was not worthy*" of them. These believers responded to the event of a world apart from the restraint of the Holy Spirit in the Church by becoming believers of Jesus as they "*had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.*"

The great cry of their hearts (and it should be our as well) is "*how long*". ***The question they ask in not whether or not God will judge and avenge them but how long until He does.***

But why do they ask for this in light of the fact the Steven as his death in acts 7:60 prayed for God's forgiveness? The answer is threefold:

1. What they ask for is not vengeance so much as what God's judgment would bring namely the establishment of His kingdom!
2. Second, they long to be clothed in the permanent righteousness of Christ instead of the temporary white robe.
3. Finally, God makes it plain that their death was neither an accident nor without purpose rather it was an appointment to which still others were to be added. Is it not great to realize that God has a specific number that even in their death God has control of His own. The enemy is not winning rather God is fulfilling the fullness of His plan.

We are also given some very interesting information concerning what happens to them after they are dead as we are told that they were given white robes. Again, those who have already been raptured as well as those who have already died will have bodies that have put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-54, 1 Thess. 4:13-17). We know that they are no longer in their earthly bodies and that they have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ (white robes) but beyond this we cannot be sure and will have to wait to see what the Lord has for them. What we do see is that they are in a place of rest and comfort where God is in control. What a contrast between these martyred believers and those who run from the presence of the Lord!

Vs. 12-17 Here we are given at the opening of the sixth seal the reaction of those in the world system.

We get a great lesson on biblical interpretation: **Always interpret the bible literally as long as it makes sense to do so!** A case in point, notice John's use of words here, he sees "a

great earthquake” then describes the sun becoming black like “*sack cloth*” and the moon becoming the color of blood. So, we can safely interpret this passage as saying there was a great earthquake and the effects of it were the darkening of the sun and the coloration of the moon.

The words “***as and like***” indicate this is what John is saying where you don’t see the use of either of those words as it relates to the fact that there will be a great earthquake.

Vs. 12-14 This is the first of three great earthquakes recorded in revelation the other are found in 11:13 and 16:18-19. This earthquake happens as the 6th seal is opened which signals the beginning of the worldwide catastrophes upon the earth. Nothing more than speculation here but what appears to happen is perhaps a meteor shower upon the earth (*stars of heaven fell*) which causes the shifting of the earth and an immediate change in climate (*a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.*) No realize that this is not the even the biggest of the three earthquakes recorded that being the one in 16:18.

Vs. 15-17 John records for us the responses of those in the world system who survive the sixth seal. Three are three things I notice about their reaction:

- a. The first thing to note is that every class of people are equally affected by these catastrophes and in turn react the same to them. How ironic it is that the world will finally untie without any class distinctions and it is in judgment as they say together, “*who is able to stand?*” (Verse 17)
- b. The second thing is that their reaction is consistent to what all of mankind has reacted towards God since the fall. Back in Gen. 3:8 we saw Adam and Eve seek to hide themselves from the presence of God and here we see those in the world doing the

same. Oh, to God that instead of hiding under the rock from the presence of God they would instead fall upon the Rock and become broken! (Matt. 21:42-44)

- c. Thirdly, notice that their fear is based upon escaping the wrath do them instead of coming to the Lord. The foolishness of a hardened heart as it knows it cannot stand and yet is unwilling to knell thus can only run away and wish for death thinking this will hide them from the presence of God.
- d. Finally, look at the words “*hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!*” Mankind has no doubt as to whom this wrath is coming nor the reason for it. The wrath proceeds from the “Lamb”, the Lamb? Not the Lion but the Lamb which is to say that those in the world will fully understand of the sacrifice of Jesus and would rather run from His love and grace and into His wrath.