

The Glory of Christ in Tribulation and Wrath (Revelation 6)

Revelation 6:1: *Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say **with a voice like thunder, "Come!"***² *And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.*³ *When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"*⁴ *And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.*⁵ *When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand.*⁶ *And I heard what seemed to be 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 wine!"*⁷ *When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"*⁸ *And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.*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 witness they had borne.*¹⁰ *They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*¹¹ *Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*¹² *When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.*¹⁴ *The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.*¹⁵ *Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

'How long' has been a question of believers in tribulation since the time of Genesis (Job 19:2). 'How long, O Lord' was often a question from suffering saints in the psalms, especially when God's people are persecuted and sinful people seem to be escaping justice (13:1-2, 74:10, 119:84), when it seems sinners are getting away with murder (82:2), when the wicked rejoice in sin (94:3). Listen to the emotion: 'How long, O Lord, will you look on?' (35:17), or 'How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?' (89:46). Moses: *who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?...Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!* (90:11, 13).

In Rev 6:10, the voice of the martyrs cry out '*O sovereign Lord, how long...*' and the cry is finally answered by the sovereign Lord in v. 11: '*...rest a little longer, until the number*' is complete. The Lord who sovereignly numbers the stars in the sky and the hairs on our head, is in control of life and death, and He will return to judge all wrongs, when stars will be cast down before Him, and men who think they're stars will bow, too. v. 15 calls them '*great ones...and the rich, the powerful, everyone*' will bow the knee, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord, to the glory of God the Father. v. 10 says He will avenge their blood.

Jesus is the ultimate Avenger, and unlike any Marvel Comics movie, no hero will be able to stand on this day when the sky splits open and armies descend from a portal in the skies. You don't want to see the His fury when He's angry. He's God's Avenger of injustice and He rules enemies with a rod of iron and shields us from the flaming artillery of the enemy. He's the ultimate Hero and Avenger defending all who are in Him. The Greeks in NT times and before worshipped Thor, the god of sky and thunder, but Jesus is the true God of sky and thunder here.

The world recognizes injustice and cries out for justice. America's big cities have seen riots when injustice is perceived, even in our supposedly civilized times. Not everyone suffers great persecution but everyone will suffer from problems, from struggles with people to struggles with pain, where it seems it will never go away. I know some of you have prayed 'how long, O Lord?' As we see the wicked rejoice in sin on the news, as we see the ungodly are prospering and the righteous suffering, as we see things that just aren't right, as we see society blaspheming Christ, we have to wonder how long can this continue? On the news we hear of barbaric executions of Christians, some by beheading, some by crucifixion even, and the saints still cry 'How long?!' Rev 6 presents these struggles, history's final intensification and vindication

Rev 6 begs the question: is our day the last days? Is the time we're living in now the time of Rev 6? How long will it be till the Lord brings this world to its end? Is our time in the end times? I have studied this extensively and can answer emphatically and dogmatically: **Yes, were living in the last days!** Now, some of you may be thinking 'oh, no--I was afraid of this when Pastor Phil said he was going to preach on Revelation, and now he's lost it and he's become one of those guys! Oh no!' Maybe others are thinking 'oh yes-this is great, I can't wait to see how it will go down, I hope he has charts in color! I can't wait to hear how the newspaper fits with Revelation, Russia, Iran!' Sorry, no charts, dates and I'm no newspaper Nostradamus or novel salesman!

I *am* 100% certain we're in the last days, but if that makes you fear or cheer in those ways, hold your horses of the apocalypse! If you're hoping to hear who the antichrist is, when the end is 7 years away ... you'll be disappointed. If you're excited to hear how a rapture movie in theaters right now, starring Nicolas Cage, fits with the chapters of Revelation, I may disappoint you, as I'm not positive it does and I think it's better to get doctrine from the NT not Nicolas Cage movies. If you're hoping that I've solved every mystery in this book, you'll be disappointed. If you're looking forward to me setting straight people of all other different views, I'll probably disappoint you. If you're praying I'll announce I changed my millennial view to yours, sorry again to disappoint (though I hope you'll see we're not that far off and we're on the same team). If you hope I agree with your views on the little details or how you've heard it taught before from another teacher, I'll probably disappoint. But if you hope to see Christ's glory as the big picture, if that's your focus, He won't disappoint.

Peter says those who keep Jesus at the center, as their '*precious cornerstone ...will not be disappointed*' (1 Pet 2:6 NAS). Don't base or build foundations on one man's interpretation of when or how the cosmic signs of Rev 6:12-16 will unfold or how exactly the sky will unroll, or your theory may later fall like the stars in this vision. Don't focus on the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse and miss the big point: there is a Lamb on the throne, a sovereign Lord who is calling them and controlling them, giving authority. Jesus is in charge of history and the universe and will one day bring it to its final consummation.

How do I know we're living in the end or the 'consummation of the ages'?

Hebrews 9:26 says '*now ... at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*' (NAS, past tense)

You say, but isn't the consummation or 'the end of the ages' a future event?

1 Cor 10:11 says Scripture is '*written for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.*' Believers in the NT era live in the end of the ages. It has come. Why do I say we're living in 'the last days'? Hebrews 1 tells us so: *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ...*' So when did the last days begin? When Jesus spoke to us (past tense) in the NT

At Pentecost when the Holy Spirit is poured out all men, Peter says: '*let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say ... this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...I will pour out my Spirit in those days*' (Acts 2:14-18 NIV - 'those days,' 'the last days' started in the 30s AD, as Pentecost proved)

We know it's the last days when the Spirit comes, Jesus speaks, is sacrificed ...so we've been in the last days since the 1st coming of Jesus. You say 'but it's been a long time and He hasn't returned' ... that's what Peter says in 2 Peter 3 and the fact that people will bring up that objection is proof, he says, that we're living in the last days, because the prophets said people would say that *in the last days* (v. 2-4). The delay of the 2nd coming doesn't mean we're not in the last days, it means grace, time for repentance, a 1,000 years is as a day to God (v. 8-9, so we've only been in the 'last days' for 2 days :)

Peter then says '*the day of the Lord will come...the heavens will pass away ...the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed...the heavenly bodies will melt*' (v. 10-12, sounds exactly what Rev 6:17 calls God's 'great day,' heavenly bodies are put out in some way in v. 13, the heavens or sky pass away in v. 14 like a scroll – Peter adds with a sound – and earthly mountains laid bare)

The end of Rev 6 isn't 'the last days,' it's language of the last day (singular) and I think it's best to see Rev 6 begins with the last days that began at the first coming of Christ and it ends/culminates in the last day, His 2nd coming. If you ask 'ok, but when it will be the *last hour* of the last days, you know, the time of antichrist?' Listen: we're living in that, too! 1 Jn 2:18: *Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.*

So John, the same one who wrote Revelation, understood that not only is it the last days, it's *the last hour* of the last days, we know *because antichrists have come*. There is an antichrist still coming, John says, but we know it's the last hour because it's already begun and will continue until Jesus returns. John writes so we know know it's the last hour and know we're saved, 5:13.

I bring all that up not to be clever, but to help us understand how Scripture interprets the last days. Some disagree, I suggest Rev 6 goes from events in the 1st century that continue throughout the centuries (at least 1st 4-5 seals) but they intensify before the last day '*great tribulation.*'

People dying for Christ began in the 1st century and will increase at the end. Then after the tribulation of the final days the 6th seal in v. 12-17 takes us to the '*last day*,' the sky rolls back as a scroll, stars and sun and moon cease to shine, and the earth is radically altered before Jesus comes riding on clouds. It's the end of the world as we know it.

Keep your finger here and turn to Matthew 24 because John heard all these things in Rev 6 before in the clear teaching of Jesus, and we always need to let the clear teaching passages help us understand what's less clear (like the apocalyptic horsemen). I already read from Peter we're in the last days and how the sun, moon, and stars going out, earth exposed or laid bare, the skies of heaven passing away with a ripping or roaring noise, those are signs that the last day of the Lord has come, Jesus will come and make a new heaven and new earth or a renewed world. Peter and John both heard Jesus teach on this, on 1st century events that begin the last days, and His return at the end. Let's focus on Jesus and what He taught for them and the later end:

Mt 24:1 *Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.* ² *But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* [scholars all agree that was literally fulfilled in 70 AD, Josephus and archaeology proves]

³ *As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be [destruction of the Jewish temple] and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* [Jesus will talk about signs of the times in their lifetime in their generation that He says will continue until the final sign of His coming at the end of the age]

⁴ *And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray.* ⁵ *For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.* ⁶ *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for **this must take place, but the end is not yet.*** ⁷ *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning*

What do we see in the horsemen of Rev 6 when Jesus opens the seals of the book of history from John's day to the last day? Rev 6:2 suggests conquest of warfare (note the military weapons and white horse, which was a symbol of victory). That's the first thing Jesus says in Mt 24:6 will begin before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, warfare, but the end of the verse says *the end is not yet*. In Rev 6:4 peace is removed between peoples who slay each other. There was a Roman peace at this time, but it unraveled before 70 AD. Rev 6:4 includes nations and kingdoms (the red pictures blood, a sword is what governments bear in Rom. 13). That's the next thing Jesus prophesies in Mt 24:7 nation rising up against nation, and the Jewish nation did rise up against the nation of Rome in war and their temple was destroyed in 70 AD. That already happened, but He says the end is not yet (theologians also use those terms 'already and not yet')

Verse 7 then mentions famines, that's the next horseman in Rev 6:5-6. The mention of the price of wheat and barley are famine conditions, supply and demand has made it so a day's wages can't support a family. The black color of the horse is still a symbol in our culture for desperate financial times (ex: 1929 U.S. stock market crash is called 'Black Tuesday').

Rev 6:5 mentions a pair of scales to measure food, and it was said when the Roman army sieged Jerusalem in the 60s AD the people 'of Jerusalem had to weigh out their food and drink because of the scarcity of those necessities...The fall of Jerusalem and the resulting famine may also explain the ironic statement in Revelation 6:6, '*and do not damage the oil and the wine.*' The command to spare the oil and the wine is possibly an allusion to General Titus' order that even during the ransacking of Jerusalem, olive trees (for oil) and grapevines (for wine) were to be spared. If so, the fall of Jerusalem serves as the perfect backdrop for the third seal judgment (6:5-6) as it does the Olivet Discourse [Mt 24]¹

Rev 6 is the last days, but remember when the last days began. Conquest, war, famine is not the end, it's just *the beginnings of birth pains*. Rom 8:22 says the earth has been groaning in pains of childbirth till now. In Rev 6:8 a 4th horseman named Death with Hades has power over 1/4th of earth to *kill* (that may include the first horseman of conquest) *by sword* (2nd horseman), by *famine* (3rd horseman), and the 4th adds *pestilence or diseases and wild animals*. Widespread death increased in the 1st century and will still until the end. It mentions these things had authority over a 4th of the earth, and if we look beyond death by these things in early centuries to the wars, conquests, or crusades later, and plagues in the middle ages, in one case a 4th of Europe was wiped out by a pestilence passed on by wild animals. Hundreds of millions have died in war, and countless millions have died by these things in Africa and the 3rd world, arguably still a 4th of earth is under the domination of conquest, warfare, famine, pestilence, diseases. But there's a 5th seal in Rev 6:9, persecution, people slain for faith in Christ.

That's the very next thing Jesus talked about in the same order in Matt 24:9: '*Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.*' This is persecution, people slain for the sake of Christ, which started in the book of Acts with Stephen, James, etc. All the other apostles had been put to death when John writes Revelation in tribulation (Rev 1:9). Tribulation is promised to us (Jn 16:33) throughout the age, but it will also become greater near the end of the age. Our job? ¹⁴ *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* [that also began in the 1st century and continues to the end of the age]

Before the world ends, our job is to get the gospel to the ends of the world, knowing as Jesus said '*lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*' (28:19-20). Let's not get riled up over different end times views and let's not get too worked up about what we see on the news, let's get to work and give this perishing world the good news! Spurgeon said: 'To my mind the doctrine of the coming of Christ ought to inflame the zeal of every believer who seeks the conversion of his fellow men, and how can he be a believer if he does not seek this end? The Lord cometh quickly: O sinner come quickly to the Lord, or it may be too late for you to come. We who call you may soon be silenced by his advent, and mercy may have no more to say to you'²

That's a word for non-Christians. A word for Christians is this: don't be obsessed w/ end times, be absorbed in evangelism. There are different views. Some say Rev 6:2 pictures Christ and His gospel going forth like arrows sent out into all the world, because Christ is riding a white horse to earth in Rev 19. If so it would still work as another parallel between Rev 6 and Mt 24. But in Rev 6 Christ is actually the Lamb on the throne and it's a living creature that commands this 1st rider to come (Jesus doesn't take orders from any created being).

Others think the 1st horseman in Rev 6 represents the 'many antichrists' Jesus mentioned would come first in Mt 24:5 who would claim to be Christ, but are actually imposters trying to look like and counterfeit Christ. If so, it's another striking parallel in the same order between the 2 passages. Or it may be a more general image not of the antichrist regime that wars against God's people, but simply imagery for conquerors in war against people, a victorious general on a white horse (1st century Rome was threatened by Parthian archers riding white horses). To Romans, white meant victory, so it could be Rome's victory in 70 AD?³

Whatever the exact original backdrop of Rev 6:2, the words of Christ move in v. 14 beyond the fall of the nation of Israel to all nations and to the end. Jesus answers both questions in v. 3, the temple *and His coming at the end*. The local tribulation in Israel in 70 AD previews a later greater global one: ²¹ *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.* ²² *And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved...[and v. 29] Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken ...*

Same events in the same order as the 6th seal in Rev 6. Rev 6:14 says first the sun will be darkened like black sackcloth, then the full moon like dark blood, then the stars fall from the sky like figs from a tree (Mt 24:32 even mentions a fig tree in this context, and in v. 33 Jesus says when you see all this, He's near, at the gate). This is the end of the age and the sign of the 2nd coming of Christ as v. 30 says, when Christ comes on the clouds with great glory, and it says all the tribes of the earth will mourn on that day, just like Rev 6:15-17 (and 1:7). I think the same John who heard Jesus teach Matthew 24 would recognize in Rev 6 the same events in the same order as the same timeframe: what began in the 1st century and will continue till final tribulation and the 2nd coming. Rev 6 doesn't start 2000+ years later, it's in NT times but ends in end times. 70 AD can't be the full and final fulfillment of these chapters, I think it's a precursor/preview locally of what will increase/repeat globally at the end.

<u>Matthew 24</u>	<u>Revelation 6</u>
v. 6-7: war and rumors of war (conquer nations)	v. 2: warfare/conquering/conquest
v. 7: kingdoms in conflict, no peace between	v. 4: no peace in earth's kingdoms
v. 7b: famines	v. 5-6: famine conditions
v. 7-9: calamity, pain, tribulation, death	v. 7-8: death combining these
v. 9b: martyrs, persecution	v. 9-11: martyrs, persecution
v. 29a: after tribulation, sun is darkened	v. 12a: after this, sun darkened
v. 29b: the moon doesn't give light	v. 12b: the moon as dark blood
v. 29c: stars fall from the heavens	v. 13a: stars fall from heavens
v. 32: a fig tree analogy	v. 13b: a fig tree analogy
v. 35: 'heaven...will pass away'	v. 14: sky rolled back like a scroll
v. 35b: 'earth...will pass away'	v. 14: mountains/islands vanish
v. 36-39: inescapable day of judgment	v. 15: inescapable day of wrath
v. 39: none can stand on that day	v. 17: 'who can stand?'

This is just part 1, there's a lot more we could say and a lot of questions you may have; come back tonight for part 2. How are we to understand different views of Revelation and how we're to relate to people with different views? What's my view? You'll have to come back tonight to hear more and tonight I hope helps us understand why good Christians see some details differently and most importantly, how Christ's glory outshines our views on Revelation

But for our Sunday morning focus I want to keep the focus on Jesus and His glory and His teaching. How did Christ's teaching apply His glory to those who are unsaved? Mt 24:30 says when He comes, they will mourn as they see the Son of Man coming '*with power and great glory.*' v. 51 says not only will there be mourning at His earthly wrath, there will weeping, gnashing of teeth at eternal wrath. Hell glorifies in the sense of magnifies His attributes.

But Christ's mercy is also magnified early in this gospel with the call to flee the wrath to come by repentance (3:7-8). I read from Peter in Acts 2 earlier, here's the rest of what he said: '*the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*' (v. 20-21). When the day of the Lord's wrath comes in Rev 6 it says many will call on rocks to crush them rather than call on the name of Jesus. The mountains can't hide you, neither can your morals, take refuge in Jesus. In 2 Thess 1:9 they '*suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed ... that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you ...*

His glorious return is to make us marvel, magnify, glorify Christ. How does that coming glory apply to believers? How do I glorify Him now as we wait in this present age? Titus 2 says this hope trains '*us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*' (v. 12-13). 2 Peter 3 applies the darkening or dissolving of heavenly bodies in Rev 6 by asking '*what sort of people ought you to be [answer?] ...holiness, godliness...*' Eschatology isn't to chart our little timelines, it's to change our lives!

And in our application let's not forget suffering persecuted brethren who are in the 5th seal. VOM gets its name from Rev 6 and helps us pray for them:

1. Pray that persecuted believers will sense God's presence (Heb. 13:5)
2. Pray that they will feel connected to the greater body of Christ (1 Cor 12:20, 26)
3. Pray that they will be comforted by God when their family members are killed, injured, or imprisoned for their faith (2 Cor. 1:3-5)
4. Pray that they will have more opportunities to share the gospel (Col. 4:3)
5. Pray for their boldness to make Christ known
6. Pray that they will forgive and love their persecutors (Matt. 5:44)
7. Pray that their ministry activities will remain undetected by authorities or others who wish to silence (Acts 9:25)
8. Pray that they will rejoice in suffering (Acts 5:41)
9. Pray that they will be refreshed through God's Word and grow in their faith (Eph. 6:17)
10. Pray that they will be strengthened through the prayers of fellow believers (Jude 20-25)⁴ [and we can pray God Himself will strengthen them like Rev 6:11]

Isa 34: *the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll* [Rev 6:14 exactly]; *All their host shall fall down As the leaf falls from the vine, And as fruit falling from a fig tree* [what Rev 6:13 says] ...*it is the day of the LORD's vengeance* [that's Rev 6:10, Isa 34:4, 8 NKJV] That's the original prophecy Rev 6 is repeating. How did the OT apply this?

Isaiah went on: '*...They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands* [the NASB says 'encourage the exhausted'] *and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."*' (Isa 35:2-4 ESV)

People who avoid thinking about the end times miss a great source of hope and comfort, and miss encouragement for exhaustion, strength for weakness and an answer to their feebleness, fears, and anxieties. Behold your God, He will come in majesty and glory to right all wrongs and to save His children.

Rev 6 isn't just for the future, it's for this life too, if children die like Horatio Spafford's. Studying and savoring Rev 6 calmed the soul of the hymnwriter: 'Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds...rolled back as a scroll...[even when] sorrows like sea billows roll...it is well with my soul'⁵

One of the places in Scripture where Horatio Spafford could say He 'taught me to say' this was Rev 6 and Isa 34, the day when the clouds of the sky are rolled back like a scroll right before the trump resounds and Jesus descends. May that day give peace like a river to attend our way, whatever our lot may be, even when Satan buffets and trials come, this blest assurance can control our emotions that roll, Christ is coming, "'Even so"-it is well with my soul.' *Even so* is also from Revelation where it quotes Mt 24 in the beginning of the book (1:7) and also at the end: *Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!* (22:20)

¹ C. Marvin Pate, "A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Zondervan, 1998), p. 153.

² Charles Spurgeon, "The Double 'Come,'" *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 27, p. 392.

³ Kenneth Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," in *Four Views*, p. 53.

⁴ "Ten Ways to Pray for the Persecuted Church," Voice of the Martyrs Ministry.

⁵ Horatio Spafford, "It is Well."