

Death, Martyrs, and Cosmic Disturbances
Revelation 6:7-17
Dr. Steven R. Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

INTRODUCTION

1. Last Sunday morning, I began a short prophecy series in Revelation chapter 6.
2. This morning I want to continue in our study of Revelation chapter six looking today at verses 7-17.
3. In verses 1-6 we saw the Lamb, who is Jesus, open the first three seals.
4. Now we're going to see what happens when He opens the next three seals.
5. To give us the setting let me begin reading at verse 1 of Revelation 6.
6. Read Revelation 6:1-17.
7. Here in chapter 6 we are given the events leading up to the rapture of the church.
8. As I noted last week, I believe that the rapture of the church occurs at the end of the sixth seal for two reasons:
 - a) The first is the use of the aorist tense verb "has come" in 6:17 which can refer to impending judgment, which would be the 7th seal (the Day of the Lord's wrath).
 - b) The second is the parallel of Joel 2:30-31 which identifies the cosmic disturbances that will occur

“before” the Day of the Lord’s wrath. These disturbances are found in the sixth seal and also parallel Matthew 24:29-30 which says this will occur prior to the appearing “of the Son of Man...in the sky.”

14. The opening of the six seals is not the Day of the Lord’s wrath but the “beginning of birth pangs” and the “wrath of Satan” found in Matthew 24:8, 21; Rev.12:12.
15. We saw last time that the first three seals perfectly paralleled Matthew 24:4-7.
16. Jesus says in verse 8 that “all these things are the beginning of birth pangs” (NAS).
17. The question that now arises is where do the next three seals fit in this prophetic time table?
18. Before I answer that question let’s first get a big picture of this period.
19. According to Daniel 9:27 the “prince who is to come” (v.26) will “confirm a covenant [treaty] with many [the people of Israel] for one week [7 years or 2520 days]; but in the middle of the week [1260 days] He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate” (NKJV).
20. Review chart (screen).
21. Before we move on at this point, let me ask, “Where does all of this fit in with *pretribulational rapture*, *midtribulational rapture* and *posttribulational rapture*?”

22. Actually it doesn't fit in anywhere other than all three views agreeing when this period begins [with the signing of the covenant by Antichrist] and how long this period will last [7 years] and at what point the covenant will be broken [the midpoint].
23. From there each view has it's own interpretation of where all these events occur in Revelation 6.
24. Remember I said last week that the *pretribulational rapture* views this entire period as the Day of the Lord's wrath and says the church is raptured before it starts– that means the church is gone before the signing of the 7 year covenant with Israel.
25. *Midtribulational rapture* views the second half of the tribulation as the Day of the Lord's wrath and places the rapture occurring before this event [the midpoint of the 7 year covenant].
26. The *posttribulational rapture* views the Day of the Lord's wrath about at the same point as midtribulationists but puts the rapture at the end or completion of the 7 year period.
27. Let's look at verses 7-17 as we examine the next three seals.
28. Now we're looking at *the fourth seal* in verses 7-8.

- I. The First Seal - False Peace (vv.1-2)**
- II. The Second Seal - War (vv.3-4)**
- III. The Third Seal - Famine (vv.5-6)**
- IV. The Fourth Seal - Death (vv.7-8)**

A. Its Opening (v.7a)

The Lamb opens the fourth seal and John hears “the voice of the fourth living creature” (NASB).

B. Its Summons (v.7b)

He calls for the fourth horse and its rider by saying “Come” or “Go forth.”

C. Its Contents (v.8)

1. John sees “an ashen horse”

It’s referred to as a “pale horse” in the AV but according to the Greek word *chlores*, where we get the English word *chlorine*, “The word means a yellowish green” (Rienecker).

Chlores “describes green vegetation in its only other New Testament uses (8:7; 9:4; Mark 6:39). The horse's color vividly portrays the pale-green pallor of death characteristic of the decomposition of a corpse” (MacArthur).

2. The name of the rider was “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.”

“Death on a massive scale is the inevitable consequence of widespread war and famine. In this macabre [gruesome] and terrifying scene, John saw Hades ... following with Death. Hades (here representing the grave) becomes, as it were, the grave digger, burying the remains of Death's victims. Death and Hades are also paired in 1:18 and 20:13, 14.

“We might think that plagues are no longer a threat because of modern antibiotics and wonder drugs. However, the great killer diseases are not conquered but merely dormant. They can spread throughout the world as fast as jet aircraft can carry them” (William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary).

The extent of the death and destruction wrought by war and famine is given. It says that authority was given to Death and Hades to destroy a fourth of the population of the earth.

In 1999 the world's population was nearly 6 billion—that would amount to the staggering total of almost 1.5 billion deaths. “In an age of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, such a total is terrifyingly plausible” (Ibid.).

Robert Van Kampen says, “Statistics have been compiled showing the percentage of the world population that belongs to various Judeo-Christian denominations, including the Jewish faith, Protestants, Catholic, Orthodox, and other smaller sects that claim the name of Christ. Together, they comprise almost exactly 25 percent of the world's population” (The Rapture Question Answered,

p.145).

Another commentator says, “Based on Daniel 2 and Ezekiel 38 the final Beast Empire will consist of peoples from modern day Iraq, Iran, Syria, Ethiopia, Libya, Ukraine, Turkey, Russia and Germany. These nations at present combine populations equal to about one-tenth the total population of the earth. However, geographically, these nations equal one-fourth the earth's total landmass. (9 million square miles)” (The Revelation Commentary).

So “one-fourth over the earth” is either referring to a geographical area or a demographic one.

“Death will use four tools in his grim task. The first three elements, the sword, famine, and pestilence, are often linked together in Scripture (e.g., 1 Chron. 21:12; 2 Chron. 20:9; Jer. 14:12; 24:10; 44:13; Ezek. 6:11), and all four elements appear in Ezekiel 14:12-21.

The sword (war) and famine have already been discussed in connection with the second and third seals; the fourth seal exacerbates these conditions.

Pestilence translates thanatos, the same word translated "Death" earlier in verse 8. Here it may primarily refer to disease as the cause of death (cf. 2:23; 18:8) but is broad enough to encompass natural disasters such as the earthquakes predicted by Jesus (Matt. 24:7), floods, and volcanic eruptions. It could also refer to the effects of biological and chemical weapons” (John MacArthur, Revelation).

Robert Mounce says, “It may be that this fourfold plague represents an intensification of that which is represented by the first three seals. Death by wild beasts (the “evil beasts” of Ezek) would be expected in a land decimated by war and famine” (The Book of Revelation, p.156).

Charles Cooper, commenting on the term “beast” in 4:8 says, “the term "wild beasts" is used in some translations has led some to a false interpretation. It should be first admitted that "wild beast" is not the correct translation of the Greek in Revelation 6:8. The word is tharion and its basic meaning is beast. It can be translated beast (Titus 1:12) or wild beast (Acts 11:6). Context determines which translation is best. It is used thirty-nine times in the book of Revelation. In thirty-eight occurrences, the term refers either to the beast, the false prophet (the second beast) or the image of the beast, and it is correctly translated beast. However, the translators attempting to clarify the meaning in Revelation 6:8 incorrectly translated the text wild beasts. There is no grounds for the translation wild beast in Revelation 6:8. Since beast (antichrist) (Rev 13:7), the false prophet (Rev 13:15), and the image of the beast (Rev 13:15) all have power to put to death; and since both the beast (Rev.13:1) and the false prophet (Rev 13:11) are of the earth, they are better referents for "beasts" in Revelation 6:8" (The Revelation Commentary).

What does Jesus say about this seal in Matthew 24:9? He says, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.”

Verse 21 describes this as “great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

V. The Fifth Seal - Christian Martyrs (vv.9-11)

A. Its Opening (v.9)

Now that the horsemen have ridden forth, the scene changes” (Mounce) the Lamb opens the fifth seal and reveals its contents.

“The fifth seal reflects the death toll caused by Antichrist’s persecution” (Van Kampen). It is the seal of martyrdom.

In Matthew 24:9 when it says “they will deliver you to tribulation [seal 4], in seal 5 they “kill you...because of My name.”

B. Its Contents (vv.9-11)

1. John sees “under the altar the souls of those who had been slain”

a) “under the altar” – this was the place of the offering.

Fritz Rienecker says they are seen under the altar “because in the Levitical rite the blood was poured out at the foot of the altar” (The Linguistic Key to the Greek NT, p.827).

b) “slain” Gr.sphazo, means “to slay, slaughter, to put to death by violence” (Strong) or by “murder” (UBS). This indicates that their

death was by murder or execution.

- c) It's not clear how John could see the *souls* of those martyrs since a soul is the immaterial part of a person. But John has up to this point has already seen things that are not humanly possible.
2. John tells us why they were “slain” – “because of the word of God, and of the testimony which they had maintained” (v.9).
- a) They were obedient to the *word of God*
 - b) They did not deny their *testimony*
 - c) This phrase “because of the word of God, and of the testimony” is the same reason John was on the island of Patmos (1:9).
 - d) As we have said many times there is a cost involved in following Jesus
 - (1) Mat.5:11 says, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”
 - (2) Luke 6:22 (parallel passage) says, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.”
 - (3) John 16:2 says, “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an

hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.”

- (4) Seal 5 is a fulfillment of all of this – this is the persecution of the Antichrist who is used by Satan to pour his wrath on the saints
 - (a) Rev.12:12 says that “the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.”
 - (b) Rev.13:7 says, “It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.”
- 3. The “souls of those who had been slain...cried out with a loud voice” in verse 10, saying, ““How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Verse 11 says, “And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest 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.”

“Those martyred saints know full well that

their martyrdom was not at the hands of God (i.e., the wrath of God), as their testimony attests. What they want to know is *when* God will retaliate with His divine wrath against those who have put them to death—the very message contained in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians” (Robert Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered*, pp.150-151).

Read 2 Thess.1:3-8

So “It is critical that the reader understands that at this point in the narration God has not begun to judge and avenge. The verb to avenge will appear again in Revelation 19:2, which depicts the end of God's wrath. No clue has yet surfaced to indicate that the wrath of God has begun through Revelation 6:10” (The Revelation Commentary).

These martyred saints are seen with the raptured saints in 7:9 “clothed in white robes; and palm branches were in their hands.”

“White garments are clearly the proper attire of those in the presence of God. Notice it will be the attire of: The overcomers, (Rev 3:4-5, 18), The Elders, (Rev 4:4), The martyrs, (Rev 6:11), The universally innumerable multitude, (Rev 7:9), The armies of heaven, (Rev 19:14)” (The Revelation Commentary).

VI. The Sixth Seal - Cosmic Disturbances (vv.12-17)

A. Its Opening (v.12)

It is the same as the 5th seal in that no voice is heard only the phrase “When He opened” referring to the Lamb.

B. Its Contents (vv.12-17)

John now sees cosmic disturbances through verse 14 and in verse 15-17 people fleeing to the “caves and among the rocks of the mountains” (v.15).

As we saw last time these disturbances occur “before” the Day of the Lord.

Joel 2:30-31 says, “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. 31 ‘The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.’”

Luke 21:25-26 says, “There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

1. Verse 12 says when this seal was opened by the Lamb “there was a great earthquake.”

“Earthquake” Gr.seismos, literally means “a shaking” (MacArthur). This word occurs 8 times in the NT and in the Septuagint in Joel 2:10 to describe the heavens trembling.

“There have been many earthquakes in recorded history...But the cataclysmic event John saw in

this seal is to be far more powerful and devastating than any previous earthquake. In fact, this one will shake more than just the earth (6:13-14)” (John MacArthur, Revelation).

“Luke 21:26 indicates that "the powers of the heavens will be shaken." This is also supported by both Matthew 24:29 and mark 13:25. However, Isaiah 13:13 and Joel 3:16 both indicate that both the heavens and the earth will be shaken during the Day of the Lord. Therefore, both the heavens and the earth will shake violently” (The Revelation Commentary).

2. Verse 12 continues by saying “the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair.”

“Sackcloth was rough cloth worn by mourners, usually made from the hair of black goats. Following the violent earthquake that devastates the earth, the sun will turn as black as a mourner's robe” (MacArthur).

Scientist Dr. Henry M. Morris explains what could cause that phenomenon:

“The great earthquake described here ... for the first time in history is worldwide in scope. Seismologists and geophysicists in recent years have learned a great deal about the structure of the earth and about the cause and nature of earthquakes. The earth's solid crust is traversed with a complex network of faults, with all resting upon a plastic mantle whose structure is still largely unknown. Whether the crust consists of great moving plates is a current matter of

controversy among geophysicists, so the ultimate cause of earthquakes is still not known. In all likelihood, the entire complex of crustal instabilities is a remnant of the phenomena of the great Flood, especially the breakup of the fountains of the great deep.

In any case, the vast worldwide network of unstable earthquake belts around the world suddenly will begin to slip and fracture on a global basis and a gigantic earthquake will ensue. This is evidently, and naturally, accompanied by tremendous volcanic eruptions, spewing vast quantities of dust and steam and gases into the upper atmosphere. It is probably these that will cause the sun to be darkened and the moon to appear blood-red. (The Revelation Record [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1983], 121).

The prophet Joel spoke of these same phenomena in connection with the Day of the Lord: "The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes" (Joel 2:31; cf. Isa. 13:9-10; Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25).

3. The third disaster in verse 12 is "the moon became like blood."

According to Dr. Morris, the effects of the great earthquake will cause "vast clouds of ash and smoke to be spewed out by the volcanic activity associated with the great worldwide earthquake. That ash and smoke will eclipse the moon, coloring it blood red as it attempts to pierce the smoke-darkened sky.

Isaiah says of this event in Isaiah 13:10, "The sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light." Joel adds, "the sun and the moon grow dark" (Joel 2:10). And, in Joel 2:31 "the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood" (cf. Acts 2:20).

"These phenomena will affect every aspect of life as the normal cycle of daylight and darkness is disrupted. The total eclipse of the sun and moon will add more reason for the world to be in panic" (MacArthur).

4. If that wasn't enough, verse 13 says then "the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind."

"Stars" (asteres) can refer to "any heavenly body other than the sun and the moon. Obviously, in this context it does not refer to actual stars, since they are far too large to fall to the earth and would incinerate it long before striking it. Also, the stars are still in place later when the fourth trumpet sounds (8:12). This is most likely a reference to asteroid or meteor showers bombarding the earth. There has been much speculation among scientists recently about the effects of a large asteroid striking the earth. Modern experts believe that the impacts of asteroids, comets, and meteors striking the earth would be devastating and cause unprecedented destruction. There will be so many such bodies hitting the earth that John, in a vivid analogy, likens the scene to a fig tree that casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. With the whole earth being pummeled by fiery balls plunging out of the blackness there will be

nowhere for people to flee, nowhere for them to hide” (John MacArthur, Revelation).

5. Then in verse 14 “The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”

John likens the sky to an unrolled scroll that splits in the middle and rolls up on either side.

This vivid picture finds a parallel in Isaiah 34:4: “And all the host of heaven will wear away, And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; All their hosts will also wither away As a leaf withers from the vine, Or as one withers from the fig tree.”

6. The sixth cosmic disturbance occurs at the end of verse 14: “And every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”

Dr. Henry Morris again says, “The earth's crust, highly unstable ever since the great Flood, will be so disturbed by the impacting asteroids, the volcanic explosions, and the worldwide earthquakes, that great segments of it will actually begin to slip and slide over the earth's deep plastic mantle. Geophysicists for many years have been fascinated with the idea of "continental drift" (although strong evidence has been accumulating against any such phenomenon occurring in the present age). Several have published theories of a past naturalistic catastrophism involving what they call "the earth's shifting crust." Some such phenomenon may actually be triggered under this judgment of the sixth seal, dwarfing the damage occasioned by all the mighty earthquakes of the

past. (The Revelation Record, 123).

7. Verses 15-17 record the reaction from all unbelievers to these cosmic disturbances:
 - a) This first effects “the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man” (v.15).

“The kings of the earth refers to the heads of state throughout the world. The great men (megistanes) are the high-ranking officials in government. The commanders are the military leaders, while the rich are those who control commerce and business and the strong may well be the influential...Nor will the common people, the lower classes, escape; every slave and free man will be as terrified as the influential and wealthy” (John MacArthur, Revelation).
 - b) They all have the same reaction: They “hid themselves...from the wrath of the Lamb” (vv.15-17).
 - c) This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 2:19-21, which says, “Men will go into caves of the rocks
And into holes of the ground
Before the terror of the LORD
And the splendor of His majesty,
When He arises to make the earth tremble.
20 In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats
Their idols of silver and their idols of gold,
Which they made for themselves to worship,
21 In order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the

cliffs Before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble.”

John MacArthur says, “The reaction of the unbelieving world to the terrors unleashed by the sixth seal will not be one of repentance (cf. 9:21; 16:11), but of mindless panic. They will finally acknowledge what believers have been saying all along, that the disasters they have experienced are God's judgment. Yet, like the demons of whom James wrote (James 2:19), they will believe and fear but will not repent. They will follow Satan, believe his lies, and embrace his messenger, Antichrist. As a result, God will judicially abandon them: "For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (2 Thess. 2:11-12). Those who repeatedly harden their hearts will have their hearts hardened by God; they will be unable to repent and believe.

The panic-stricken sinners will react irrationally, foolishly attempting to hide themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains (cf. Isa. 2:17-21)—the very places that are being shaken. They are no doubt seeking refuge from the swarms of meteors and asteroids bombarding the earth. But in light of the massive earthquake and its continuing aftershocks, the widespread volcanic eruptions, and the other disturbances

to the earth's crust, such hiding places will offer no safety. Further, it is impossible to hide from God or evade His judgment” (Revelation).

8. The question in verse 17 asked is a direct parallel of Joel 2:11:

“The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?”

CONCLUSION

1. These next three seals will begin with the wrath of Satan as he moves the Antichrist to persecute the saints and will close with the cosmic disturbances associated with the coming of the Day of the Lord’s wrath.
2. In the 6th seal, they will think that this terrifying preparation is the actual wrath of God but it will only be a prep for what He is yet about to do.
3. “For the great day of His wrath has come [aorist tense]” tells us that all of these cosmic disturbances will usher in the Day of the Lord.
4. And who will be “able to stand?”
5. The only way to escape the wrath that is to come upon all ungodly sinner is to repent and turn to Jesus for salvation.
6. When you repent from your sin, He removes the condemnation and grants you eternal life.

7. Will you flee this Day that is to come?
8. If this doesn't move you, neither will the opening of the six seals.
9. Cry out for God's mercy and repent! (Pray).