

**Text: Rev 6.1-17**

The three-fold outline of Revelation (1.19):

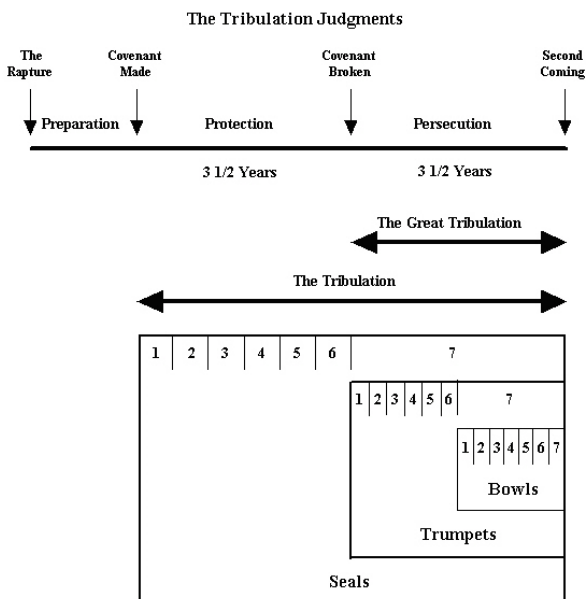
1. The things you have seen (the vision of Christ) Rev 1
2. The things which are (the letters to the churches) Rev 2-3
3. The things which must come after these things (Rev 4-22)
  - a. The overture: the scene in heave (Rev 4-5)
  - b. The seal judgements begin (Rev 6)

“John received revelation concerning the judgments that would take place on earth after the Lamb opened the seals on the scroll (5:1). God gave him this information to help us understand what will take place in the future.”<sup>1</sup>

“The failure of scholars to agree on the correlation of events that have happened in church history with these judgments confirms that the events predicted here are still future (cf. 1:19; 4:1).”<sup>2</sup>

Note: This is a very important observation.

**I. Over-all context (on last page in handout)**



<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Rev 5.14.

<sup>2</sup> Constable, Rev 5.14.

“The seven-sealed book ... is the comprehensive program of God culminating in the second coming of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

The “beginning of birth-pangs” (Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8)  
The first half of the Tribulation

Matt. 24:4–5	Mark 13:6	Luke 21:8	Antichrists	Rev. 6:1–2	First seal
Matt. 24:6–7	Mark 13:7–8	Luke 21:9–10	War	Rev. 6:3–4	Second seal
Matt. 24:7	Mark 13:8	Luke 21:11	Famine	Rev. 6:5–6	Third seal
Matt. 24:9	Mark 13:12	Luke 21:16	Death	Rev. 6:7–8	Fourth seal
Matt. 24:9–13	Mark 13:9–13	Luke 21:12–19	Martyrdom	Rev. 6:9–11	Fifth seal
		Luke 21:11	Earthly & heavenly phenomena	Rev. 6:12–17	Sixth seal

## II. The First Four Seals: the four horsemen (1-8)

### A. The First (1-2)

1. In each of the first four seals, we see the Lamb break the seal and one of the four living creatures calls, ‘Come!’
2. The Rider on the white horse
  - a. The horse in the vision is a war horse (context)
  - b. The rider carries a bow but no arrows (usually interpreted as conquering ‘bloodlessly’, *i.e.*, without a fight)
  - c. The rider is given a crown, he enters in conquest
  - d. The white horse could represent purity, but one commentator observes: “When men wage war they always pretend to be fighting for righteousness.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 124.

<sup>4</sup> D. T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible*, p. 58, quoted in Constable, *Expository Notes*, Rev 6.2.

### 3. Interpretation:

- a. Many different suggestions, often dependent on approach to Revelation: some who think of this as an elaborate description of history (already fulfilled) take the first rider to be Jesus Christ
- b. "The whole context and character of these seals absolutely forbid our thinking of this rider being the Lord Jesus, as so many affirm. *His reign shall not bring war, famine, and strife in its train.*"<sup>5</sup>
- c. "The most probable view is that this is a prophecy of Antichrist who will make a covenant with Israel but only as a pretense for destroying the Jews (cf. Dan. 9:27; 1 Thess. 5:3)."<sup>6</sup>
- d. If the pre-tribulationary Rapture is the correct view, the world will
  - 1) Be in economic chaos (sudden loss of many people)
  - 2) Will be full of fear
  - 3) Will look to a saviour, and one will emerge, seemingly bringing peace

### B. The Second (3-4)

#### 1. The Rider on the red horse

- a. Red horse symbolizes bloodshed and war
- b. Rider authorized to take peace from the earth
- c. A great sword given to him

#### 2. Interpretation:

- a. This is not the war that engulfs Israel at the middle point of the tribulation
- b. This is war by which antichrist subjugates any people of the earth who resist his rule (Constable suggests Ezekiel 38-39, battles of Gog and Magog)

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<sup>5</sup> F. A. Jennings, *The Dawn of the Scarlet Age*, 74, quoted in Walvoord, "Revelation in BKCNT," 126.

<sup>6</sup> Constable, *Expository Notes*, Rev 6.2.

## C. The Third (5-6)

### 1. The Rider on the black horse

- a. The rider carries a pair of scales in his hand
- b. A voice rings out, quoting highly inflated prices
  - 1) A whole day's wages for one meal
  - 2) In John's day a denarius would purchase 12-15 times as much
- c. Voice says, "do not damage oil and wine" – do not tamper with, strict controls in place

### 2. Interpretation

- a. This represents the consequences of the Antichrist's wars
- b. The food supply will suffer interruptions and scarcity
- c. Government will impose strict economic controls (for the good of all)

## D. The Fourth (7-8)

### 1. The Rider on the ashen horse

- a. Ashen: lit., pale green – "the color of a human corpse"<sup>7</sup>
- b. Rider's name is "Death"
- c. "Hades" (the grave) accompanies him
- d. Authority given to this grim pair to take one quarter of the earth's population by various calamities

### 2. Interpretation:

- a. This staggering death toll is the consequence of Antichrist's failed policies, and the wars that accompany his rule
- b. The death is not due to one single cause, but each calamity fuels the next – the administration of Antichrist is seemingly ending badly

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<sup>7</sup> Constable, Rev 6.8.

“If one-fourth of the world population is destroyed in the fourth seal, it would represent the greatest destruction of human life ever recorded in history.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Google, today (May 7, 2022), the world population is 7.9 billion people — this would mean almost 2 billion dead in this judgement.

- c. Note: Walvoord takes this terrible calamity to be part of the second half of the Tribulation period, the time of “great tribulation”
  - 1) However, the Great Tribulation specifically targets Israel
  - 2) This affliction affects the whole earth, and the focus will shift to Israel in the next chapter

### III. The fifth seal: A scene in heaven (9-11)

- A. The scene shifts to heaven and an altar in the heavenly temple (9)
  - 1. John sees the souls of martyrs waiting underneath the altar (at its foot)
  - 2. Their location represents the idea that they constitute an offering to the Lord from the earth during this time
  - 3. These souls evidently have come to faith in Christ following the Rapture, a consequence of the rise of Antichrist
  - 4. Their resurrection will not occur until the end of the Tribulation (Rev 20.4)
- B. The prayers of the martyrs (10)
  - 1. They appeal to the Lord
  - 2. They cry for vengeance
  - 3. Their prayer implies their persecutors still live

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<sup>8</sup> Walvoord, “Revelation in BKCNT,” 131.

### C. The response (11)

1. They receive white robes (the symbol of justification)
2. Their instructions: wait for other martyrs to come
3. The implication is that additional events must happen before the Lord sets all things right with his return

## IV. The sixth seal: terror on earth (12-17)

### A. Great signs in heaven and earth (12-14)

1. Tremendous earthquake (12)
2. Signs in heaven (12-13)
  - a. Darkening of sun
  - b. Moon becomes 'blood' – like an eclipse, a darkening
  - c. Stars fall (meteorites?)

Appear to be a consequence or a follow-up to the earthquake

3. Strange phenomena in the sky (14)
  - a. We are not sure what this means
  - b. May give earth dwellers a glimpse of the throne in heaven (see v. 16)

### B. The fear of men (15-17)

1. All classes of people react with fear and hide themselves (15)
2. The people call on the rocks to bury them (full of fear) (16)
3. There is some recognition by the people of the earth that they are in great trouble from the Lord (17)

"There seems to be no general turning *to* God in repentance with a plea for mercy, but only a turning *from* the face of God."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 48.

**Conclusion:**

“Note that the Tribulation will be a distinct judgment of God unique from other times of distress that the earth has ever experienced (Jer. 30:7). It will be worldwide and severe. Furthermore everyone will not only know that it is a divine judgment, but they will act like it by seeking death to hide from God, not just from these calamities. The judgments of the sixth seal appear to be a foreshadowing of the similar but even greater judgments that will come at the end of the Tribulation, just before Jesus Christ returns to the earth (cf. 16:17–21; Matt. 24:21).”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Constable, *Expository Notes*, Rev 6.17.