

“APOCALYPSE SOON”

“Beginning of the End” (Revelation 6:1-8)

The Lamb has claimed title deeds to creation. Now the seals will be opened and it will be the beginning of the end. The vision will move from the focus of the throne room in heaven in Revelation 4-5 to the earth in Revelation 6-19. This chapter 6 begins the period in world history of unprecedented judgment with earthquakes, famines, floods, diseases, and wars known as the Great Tribulation Period (GTP). It will last at least 7 years and will culminate in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:14 -16), the return of Christ in Revelation 19, and the establishment of His earthly millennial kingdom in Revelation 20.

The Lord Jesus Christ described this period in world history of unprecedented judgment which precedes His return, *“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”* (Matt. 24:21) The Old Testament prophets repeatedly spoke of this apocalyptic period of world history. These will be terrifying times for the Jews as they face a second and greater Holocaust. The Jews will first be restored to their ancient homeland, *“For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it”* (Jer. 30:3) and then they face there the Great Tribulation, *“Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.”* (Jer. 30:7) They will be finally *“saved out of it”* by the return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

ORDER OF THE SEALS

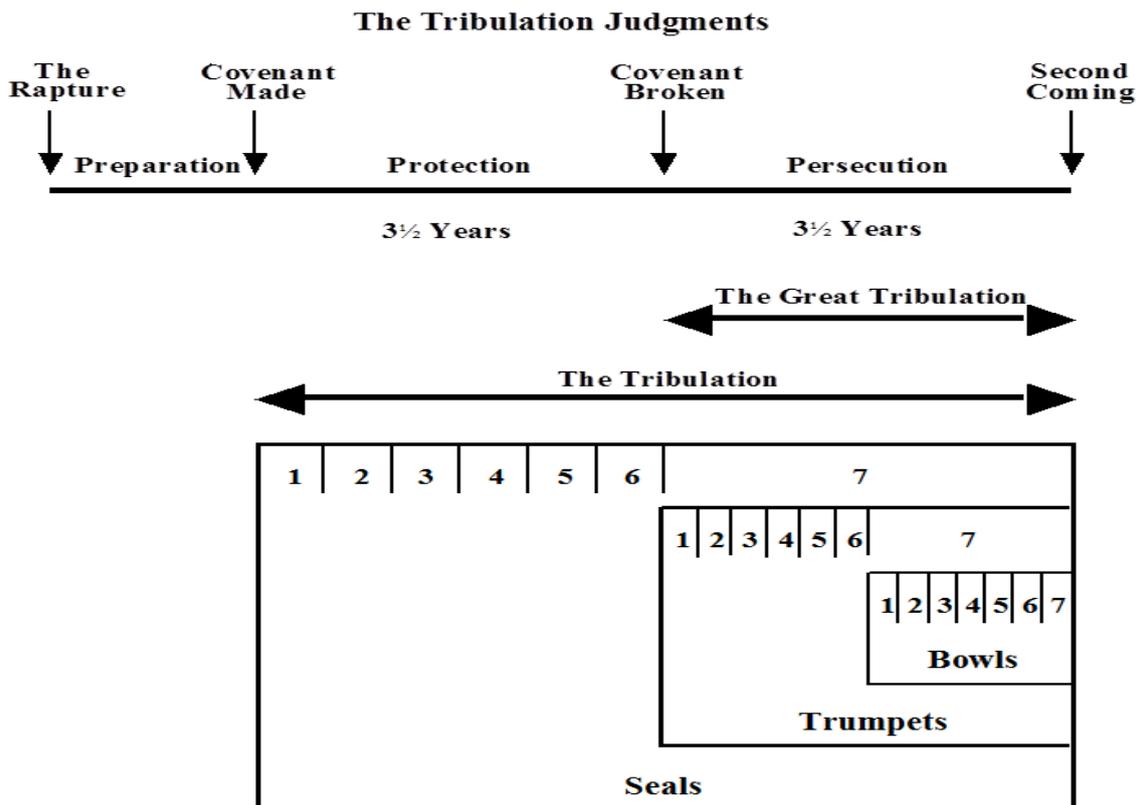
There are 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 vials or bowls mentioned from Revelation 6-16. They seem to represent three distinct phases of judgment in the GTP poured out in a sequential manner on the earth. The seals generally refer to judgments in the early part of the GTP, the trumpets are around the middle part of the GTP, and the seven bowl judgments towards the end of the GTP. Seven is the number of completion in the Bible. The GTP judgments will be complete and perfect in dealing with sin and sinners. John MacArthur breaks it down in the following manner,

“It seems best to understand the first four seals as taking place during the first half of the Tribulation, the fifth stretching from the first into the second half, (called the “great tribulation” in Rev. 7:14 and lasting three and one-half years; Rev. 11:2; Rev. 12:6; Rev. 13:5) and the sixth and seventh taking place during that “great tribulation.” Apparently the seventh seal contains the seven trumpet judgments (Rev. 8:1; Rev. 11:19) and the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15) contains the seven bowl judgments (Rev. 16:1-21). The seven seals thus contain all the judgments to the end when Jesus Christ returns.”

Many commentators see obvious parallels with these seven seals and Matthew 24 (cf. Mark 13, Luke 21). MacArthur observes further,

“Just as a mother’s birth pains increase in frequency and intensity as the time to give birth approaches, so the judgments depicted by the seals will intensify throughout the Tribulation until they culminate in the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ in blazing judgment glory. The first four seals cover the period Jesus described as “the beginning of birth pangs” (Matt. 24:8). As terrible as those four judgments are, they are but the preliminary outpouring of God’s final wrath in the last three seals.”

Matthew 24:4-5 — False Christ's promoting false peace	First Seal — Rider on the white horse (Rev. 6:1-2)
Matthew 24:6-7a — Wars and rumours of war	Second Seal — Rider on the red horse (Rev. 6:3-4)
Matthew 24:7b — Famines	Third Seal — Rider on the black horse (Rev. 6:5-6)
Matthew 24:7c-8 — Pestilence, earthquakes	Fourth Seal — Rider on the pale horse (Rev. 6:7-8)
Matthew 24:9 — Persecution	Fifth Seal — Martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11)
Matthew 24:29 — Cosmic disturbances	Sixth Seal — Cosmic Disturbances (Rev. 6:12-13)
Matthew 24:37 — Cataclysmic events	Seventh Seal - Cataclysmic events (Rev. 8:1)



There seems to be a clear distinction between the seals 1-4 and seals 5-7. The first 4 seals are linked and follow a similar pattern:

- (1) The Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb breaks the seal
- (2) One of the 4 beasts cries out, "Come and see."
- (3) A coloured horse and a rider appear to inflict a distinct judgment



And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. (v1-2)

As soon as the Lamb opens the first seal, the first of 4 horsemen of the apocalypse comes into view, “*And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.*”



There is some debate over who the person on the white horse is and many argue that it is Jesus Christ based on the rider of the white horse in Revelation 19:12 and others think it is the Antichrist promoting a false peace on the earth. However, as the other 3 horsemen represent impersonal phenomenon or forces (war, famine, and death) it is probably better to see the rider on the white horse as representing the forces of false peace and security. The symbol of a horse normally is associated with strength, glory, and victory.

The GTP will have a period of false peace during the first half of it alongside a counterfeit religion (cf. Jer. 6:14; 1 Thess. 5:3). This will be promoted by false prophets and most successfully by the Antichrist, “*And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*” (Matt. 24:4-5) The picture of the rider with a *stephanos* crown is apt, as the Antichrist will be sovereignly permitted to receive his power from the other rulers of the world. He is pictured with a bow but no arrows on this white horse conquering without bloodshed. This is the devil’s attempt to place his false christ to rule on earth. It is his last throw of the proverbial dice before the real Christ rules in His glorious millennial kingdom.

The bitterest and most enduring conflict in this world is the perennial animosity between the Jews and the Arabs in the Middle East. The whole world is crying out for a solution. They

are desperate for someone who can promise peace and bring peace to the world. Antichrist will promise to square the circle by bringing peace between Jews and Arabs and rebuilding the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The Jews have longed for peace, prosperity and a new temple for centuries, “*And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many.*” (Dan. 8:25) The Antichrist will deceive them by seemingly being able to deliver these cherished objectives. He will win the hearts of Israel and the unbelieving Gentile world, like Absalom, by guile and empty promises rather than by force. This evidently begins Daniel’s 70th week (cf. Dan. 9:26-27). Charles Ryrie observes,

“The deluding influence comes from God; it is both a punishment and a moral result of their rejection of the truth (vv. 10, 12). These verses reflect the OT concept that God is sovereign even in the activities of the powers of evil (cf. Ex. 4:21; Josh. 11:20; 1 Kings 22:19-23; 1 Chron. 21:1; cf. 2 Sam. 24:1). The result will be that men will believe what is false, as Satan works through Antichrist.”

However, the peace agreement the Antichrist makes with Israel will be broken in the middle of the GTP, “*And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.*” (Dan. 9:27) This will result in another Holocaust on the Jews as the Antichrist seeks to destroy them (cf. Zech. 13:8-9; Matt. 24:4-10).

And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. (v3-4)

A second horseman follows the first horseman after the Lord Jesus Christ opens the second seal. This horseman on a red horse is a very different type of force, “*and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.*” The red colour likely symbolizes the blood that will be spilt in this period of the GTP. The short-lived peace established by the Antichrist will be exposed as a deception. The word translated, “*great sword*” is *machaira*, which refers to a dagger-like weapon that was used by Roman soldiers in battle and assassins. There will clearly be much warfare, revolt, and terrorism during this short period. Much of it will be through world wars and civil wars as man competes with man for supremacy, “*and that they should kill one another.*” It correlates with what Christ described,

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. (Matt. 24:6-7)

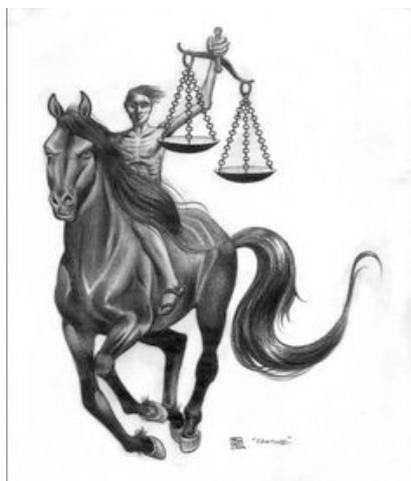
The Antichrist will be a skilled man of war. When his authority and powerbase, which is obtained by guile, is now threatened he will react in a ruthless and barbaric way. He will establish to restore his Empire by force. Daniel 8:24 reveals just how effective a warrior he will be, “*And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.*”

We should not miss the sovereign hand of God in all of these things, “*and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth.*” It was God who sovereignly permitted the Antichrist to establish his false peace in a bloodless conquest, “*and a crown was given unto him: and*

he went forth conquering, and to conquer.” (v2) Now it is God who sovereignly brings it to an end by unleashing the bloodshed of this period. This power of a removal of peace is, directly or indirectly, the judgment of God. This is part of the wrath of the Lamb.

And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. (v5-6)

The third seal is then opened. This time a rider on a black horse appears. Black is a colour often associated with famine, *“Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.”* (Lam. 5:10) The pair of balances or scales and the voice shouting out prices likely symbolize the rationing of basic food commodities and economic hyperinflation. The prices listed are between 8-16 times the average prices for that period of history in the Roman Empire. A *“measure of wheat”* is just enough to feed a person for one day and a *“penny”* or denarius is a day’s wages (cf. Matt. 20:2). Barley was an even cheaper produce for the very poor. Doubtless, those with families could only afford that. So every individual will just earn barely enough money to survive. The expression, *“see thou hurt not the oil and the wine”* is a warning to all to take great care not to damage these precious commodities that are needed for cooking, heating, and water purification. Famine is often a direct consequence of worldwide warfare so it is no surprise that it breaks out after the second seal judgments begin. The Lord Jesus Christ links the two in the Olivet Discourse, *“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.”* (Matt. 24:7)



And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (v7-8)

The fourth seal summoned forth a *“pale horse.”* The Greek word translated *“pale”* is *chloros* indicating a greenish-yellow, the pale sickly colour of sickness and death. We are told of the character of this horse and rider, *“his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.”* This fourth horseman is where we get the popular expression of the grim reaper! He leaves behind a trail of death and devastation. Death speaks of the killing of the physical body and Hell of the destruction of the eternal soul.

This global destruction of life by famine, war, disease, animals, and natural disaster is on an unprecedented scale with one quarter of the world's population dying. It is linked to what Christ prophesied, *"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."* (Matt 24:7-8) If we take the August 2016 world population of 7.441 billion people, then there will be around 1.866 billion (1,860,000,000) people who will die in these few years. With the availability and prevalence of conventional, nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare such destruction is very plausible.

Again we must note that behind all these judgments is the sovereign hand of God, *"And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."* It is the Lamb who holds the book and the Lamb who decides when the seals are broken and the Lamb is the One who breaks the seals. This does not mean that all the instruments God uses to bring about this death on a mammoth scale, such as warfare, are intrinsically good. God's sovereignty enables Him to work through the evil motives and actions of wicked men without God being the author and source of sin. However, the converse of this should be noted. These instruments of God's destruction, whether they be the antichrist or others, have no inherent power in which to launch their attacks and no inherent right to do so. All of them are pawns in God's sovereign plan for redemptive history. Only One Person could declare that He is all-powerful, *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* (Matt. 28:18) The vision of the throne of heaven in Revelation 4-5 is not without coincidence. All hell may break loose on earth but it is still fully under the sovereign power and will of Almighty God.



These first 4 seals have unleashed destruction on a truly terrifying scale. However, far worse is still to come, for as Matthew 24:8 warns, *"All these are the beginning of sorrows."* There will be greater judgments of God's anger unleashed on the earth, as the fury of Satan is let loose and the evil nature of man is less restrained. This is followed by eternal destruction in hell for the unrepentant. The Lamb's wrath is only just beginning.