

Lesson # 19 The First Seal Judgment

Revelation 6:1-2

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¹Now 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!" ²And 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.

I. Introduction to the Seal Judgments

We now leave the preparatory scenes of heaven from chapters 4 & 5 behind us, and the vision of the End Times takes over as the beginning stages of God's final judgment on earth unfold. The scroll is now in the hands of the One with authority to open it, and He will break the seals and unleash what is contained within it. Whereas some theologians contend that what is before us in chapter 6 & following is completed history, specifically – the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and his troops – the scope of what is depicted from this point on in Revelation is decidedly global rather than local, and thus cannot logically be considered to be historic in nature, and especially not of just Jerusalem in particular.

These seal judgments, of which there are 7, form the basis for not only the beginning of the Tribulation, but the final judgments – trumpets & bowls – are found within the scroll as the details of the 7th seal.

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The 1st 4 seals, as they are opened, reveal 4 horses & riders – often called “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” – and they symbolize 4 stages of development on earth as the Tribulation begins and progresses, plus, they find a parallel in Matthew 24 as Christ tells His disciples what the signs of His return will be. The 1st 5 stages are: world peace, war, famine, death & persecution. These 4 horses and the 5th seal exactly parallel [Matt. 24: 3-14](#).

These 1st 4 seals are represented by 4 different coloured horses – white, red, black & pale (greenish). The colours are important keys to what each horse represents, as we'll see.

The World Prepares for the First Rider

Most, if not all of us believe that the scenes presented in Rev. 6ff are just over the horizon, and they very well may be. We have experienced in our lifetime a moral slide from general naiveté in most people to degradation & moral turpitude on a scale unlike any seen in known history, with the exception of perhaps localized evil times within certain nations under certain dictators. We have seen the erosion of the notion of a standard of truth accepted by virtually the entire culture to a floating standard of ‘tolerance’ for anything & everything in the name of “if it feels good, it must be good”. We've seen churches empty in droves as people lose any interest in God, at least, as the Bible reveals Him. In religious circles, ecumenism is thriving, while doctrinal standards are regarded as hate mongering; all kinds of perverse sin is not only tolerated but

celebrated & protected by law; the largest ‘churches’ are halls of deceit where motivational speakers masquerading as pastors ‘tickle the ears’ of those who just want to be entertained under the guise of social religion; where denominational borders are blurred on purpose so that no one is offended by what you or I believe. Violent religions like Islam & Hinduism are given a pass for all sorts of human rights violations while true Bible Christianity is being marginalized, demonized and drummed out of existence by political posturing and persecution at levels never seen before in North America.

On the socio-political front, wars in Iraq & Afghanistan; genocide & great evil in the Sudan and other places are killing hundreds of thousands; national & regional famines exist; economies topple as man’s greed finally pulls the rug out from under common sense finances; a push to ‘green the planet’ by so-called scientists and wannabe scientists tell us we must shell out big tax money we don’t have to save the planet from ‘global warming’, ‘global cooling’ or whatever ‘threat’ will extract the most emotional response; families are under attack against traditional values and structure; the middle class is being removed by the encroachment of taxes at ridiculous levels; security is threatened by extreme mismanagement & corruption by many governments and the rise of media sensation ‘leaders’ who have no idea how to rule over anyone merely look good as they send their respective countries into a hopeless spiral of loss & discouragement.

All of this downward spiral is leading somewhere, and God is not taken by surprise by any of it. It is not random, but is being orchestrated to prepare the world for the need for 1 worldwide leader – who should be Jesus Christ – but instead he will be a pretender, a false Christ, a usurper of God’s authority, a Nimrod antitype, who will be known by believers as Antichrist or “The Beast”, but by the world as the great saviour of mankind, at least initially. ②

As the preliminary scenes are played out – and I believe we may be seeing those scenes now – the world stage is being set for this 1st horse and rider to enter the picture and proclaim that he has the answer to all of the world’s worst problems, and at first it will appear that he does. This will be in part, a similar situation to when God gave Israel a king, when they should have been ecstatic that He was their king. Just as Israel did not anticipate what the eventual outcome of this action would be (cf. [I Samuel 8:6-21](#)), so the world anticipates that finally, a human solution has been found and God is no longer needed. They could not be more mistaken and deceived!

II. The First Horseman is Called to Present Himself v. 1

John watches as the Lamb opens the first seal. Only Jesus – that was the point of Revelation 5 – has the power & authority to open the scroll & break the seals & He does so. God’s warnings of coming judgment are not idle threats which He will never act on. This was the claim of the false prophets Peter wrote about in II Peter 2:1-9 & responded to in 3:1-13.

As the Lamb opens the 1st seal, John hears one of the 4 Living Creatures say with a thunderous voice, “Come!” Christ opens the seal, yet this angelic being initiates the action, calling forth the first stage of God’s end time plans.

In the case of all the first 4 seals, nothing is read from the scroll, but action begins to take place. Also, in each of the 4 seals, there is an utterance from 1 of the 4 Living

Creatures followed by the appearance of a horse and a rider who have some power over the earth, that power emblematically expressed by the colour the horse. In each case, the command to “come” is addressed not to Christ or to John (to see), but to these 4 horses and horsemen.

Why horses? Horses are associated with victory, war and military might throughout the bible – note Job 39:19-25; Psalm 20:7; Prov. 21:31; Jer. 4:13; **Ezekiel 26:10-14**.

This first horse is white in colour & it is obvious by the context of the verse that this horse is associated with victory (conquering, to conquer). The colours of the 4 horses is intriguing and is certainly a part of the symbolism. White is usually associated with purity, holiness, justification and spiritual victory, and in fact, Christ’s return to earth in Rev. 19:11 depicts Him riding a white horse. This has led to some confusion among scholars who then assume (incorrectly) that this first rider is Christ. That could not be farther from the truth because this horse, and all 4 horses are associated with the beginnings and continuation of sorrows and judgment (cf. Matt. 24:5-8), not the return of Christ to bring real peace to the earth.

This horse is white because it represents feigned holiness – a deceitful pretender to be worshipped. The rider is only apparently righteous, but it is only a mask, an act. Just as Satan poses as an angel of light, this rider will pose as the long awaited one from God. The identification of this rider, as you might imagine, is the source of plenty of confusion. He is thought of as perhaps:

- The Roman emperor (by those who see this as historic)
- The Word of God sent to judge the world (JN 12:48b)
- Personification of judgment sent to conquer the earth (Zech. 1:8; 6:1-8)
- The victorious course of the Gospel (MT. 24:14)
- The Parthian invasion of the Roman Empire – the early Christian era
- Warfare in general & the Parthian invasion secondarily
- The Jewish Messiah – Rev. 19:11-16; MK 13:10ⁱ

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All of these views have severe weaknesses and cannot stand up to critical analysis.

The most likely identification of this rider is the 1 world ruler – the Beast of Rev. 13 – the Antichrist. He will come as the counterfeit Christ. The first in the sequence of events described by Christ in the Olivet Discourse is the emergence of numerous Christ-imposters – cf. Matt. 24:5; 24:24; MK 13:6 & LK 21:8.

In fact, all 4 of these horses and horsemen are associated with this end times character, providing a symbolic or emblematic graphic plan and results of his course of world conquest.

It must also be stated here that most believe that the riders are not necessarily individuals but rather a personification of a force or movement that will be at work on the earth during the times of these seal judgmentsⁱⁱ. Christ spoke of many imposters who will be working in concert to defeat Him. The Antichrist is thus a representative of the force for peace, war, famine & death.

III. A Bow, a Crown and a Bloodless Victory v. 2

This first rider holds a bow – traditionally the weapon of a warrior and a symbol of victory (cf. Zech. 9:13-14). However, it is notable that no arrows are mentioned & this is quite significant, because it indicates that the victory this rider enjoys is bloodless, likely political or socio-economic in nature rather than military. Or if it is military, then the mere threat of the use of this man’s authority will be enough to bring about peace. But in order for such authority to carry any weight, there has to have been a history of military victory to back it up. Victory is accomplished by peaceful means rather than military conquest, and worldwide peace will be the result of this first seal judgment – as people cry “Peace! Peace!” when there really is no peace, only a false sense of it which will be short-lived. We know that peace is the first result, because the 2nd rider removes peace from the earth by war. No death is mentioned in the first seal. The peace this rider brings will be under his terms, and he will have an agenda that transcends just having peace.

The 2nd descriptive word about the rider is that he has a crown that “was given to him”. The Greek word here translated crown is “*stephanos*” rather than diadem (*Gr. diadema*) which identifies him as victorious rather than royal or divine. Notice especially that this crown was given to him. It is not as if he forced someone to give it to him, but it was given by One with higher authority than he possesses. The Greek word “*edothē*” speaks of divine permission given to evil powers to carry out their mission – cf. Rev. 9:1,3,5; 13:5,7,14,15, etc. Every event (& this is critical to understand) – every event in the judgments sent on the world is initiated from God’s throne as described in Rev. 4 – 5, and the events depicted must be interpreted in that context. Rev. 6-18 is not chaos or evil run amuck, but rather is a display of controlled, planned, designed expressions of God’s wrath being poured out in sequential order to accomplish His divinely appointed results. ④

This rider will enjoy a period of dominion over the world & will deceive the world with a false peace, even in Israel, but it is only temporary – cf. [Dan. 9:27](#).

“He came out conquering and to conquer” seems to carry the meaning of a series of victories, leading to ultimate conquest & dominion, which will be temporary. The peace achieved will only be a deceitful weapon to lull the world into a false sense of security, so that the remainder of the agenda of Satan, and the purpose of God can unfold in the manner God has decreed. They will be saying “peace, peace” when there is no real peace. Things will appear to get better, but will only get much, much worse.

Since Cain & Abel there has been war – skirmishes, gang fights, threats, embargos, civil wars, genocides, all out war – and on and on. We have to wonder, under what circumstances would the world ever be able to set aside their differences in language, intellect, culture, socio-economic status, politics, pride, greed, power, age, race & ethnicity long enough to have peace, especially on a worldwide scale!?

Remember here that God invented time and is using it to bring about His decrees and plan, and as time marches on, the future is built on the past. What we see here as the first stage of the Tribulation is not going to occur in a vacuum, but will appear to be from earth’s perspective, within the natural flow of events taking place prior to the setting up of this rider as the world leader. Providence, not miracle is how all this will unfold – seemingly within the normal flow of day to day events.

The world, of course, hungers for peace. Peace is the ultimate politically correct thing to express a hope for in a public setting, but not if it comes attached to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, it is only possible through Jesus Christ.

So how can peace be brought about without wartime victory by some superpower who has the authority, power and diplomacy skills to bring about & enforce peace? We are seeing the precursors of this forming today in some or all of the following:

- The removal of trade barriers & regional or continent wide trade agreements – ECU; NAFTA – are outing nations into partnerships that would have been potential conflicts in the past. Even currencies are being unified – ie.) the Euro, talk about a North American dollar, etc. The world is chasing some way to unify everything so that business can thrive in a global economy and people can make more & more money. Economic summit meetings are becoming more common, with attempts being made on a regular basis to regulate banks, stock markets, etc. and bring them under a unified, global authority. This will supposedly alleviate the problems of rampant poverty, the unavailability of affordable housing, lack of access to medical procedures, trade inequities, etc.
- The ecological, global conservation of resources – what’s big now? Global warming. This ties up trillions of dollars and pits everyone against a common “enemy.” We are seeing the first vestiges of this in the “eco-fees” we are being charged when we purchase just about any consumable product other than food.
- Evolution or Darwinism – rightly understood, it should provide people with a reason to fight one another to the death, but it has instead become a religion itself and is knitting people together with a so-called “common ancestry”.
- Post-modernism – no truth exists and tolerance for everything except Christianity is the order of the day. Christianity will continue to be marginalized and will eventually become illegal (and already is in many countries) because the world cannot stomach reminders of their guilt before God that is the chief message of the real Christian Gospel. ⑤
- Religious ecumenism & liberalism – this will become a key player in global unity. It is even shown to be so in the great Harlot of Revelation 18 - where it is a worldwide system battling against those who are being saved during the Tribulation. A former Pope, John-Paul II said, “Christians must work with all other religions to secure peace.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- What does the bible say about the end times as it relates to the church? The main passage is found in **II Timothy 3:1-5,13**
- The threat of radical Islam. Don’t overlook the power of a religion whose reason to be is to convert or kill every person on the planet, so that they can dominate the world and bring it under Sharia law. Global unity can be manufactured if the right people feel threatened enough to knuckle under the threat of violence and grant political protection to this religion. When the threat of violent retaliation surrounds any sort of “hate” speech, then the natural result is that people will avoid saying anything derogatory about Islam, even when what is being said can be proven to be absolutely true. Just consider for example how the history of the Crusades have been twisted to make it appear as if the Christians started it all and Islam only defended itself against the violence these crazy Christians brought to them. I believe this is an avenue that is very viable & likely the precursor of Antichrist and the seal judgments. Look at the exponential growth of Islam over the last 10-20 years, despite its’ violent nature!
- Science – this too has become a type of religion and people from all over the world stand ready to follow every whiff of new discoveries that will “better

- mankind”, especially if the discovery can help explain man’s beginnings apart from God.
- Media bias – if there is a liberal or wrong side of an important moral or ethical issue (homosexuality, gay marriage, conservative politics, abortion), the media will find it and hammer it to death in the news, entertainment & talk shows.
 - The disappearance of 100’s of millions of people in a Pre-Trib Rapture could be the very impetus for the Antichrist to step onto the world stage as leader with a plausible answer to where all these trouble-making believers have gone. His Satanic leadership skills will allow him to become the superstar politician / diplomat everyone has been longing for. Note **II Thess. 2:6-12**.

People today are not as concerned with borders, race, ethnicity or religious differences – with the possible exception of Mid-East terrorists – as they are with quality of life & security. When someone comes along who can demonstrate some ability to consistently provide a means to achieve those things, the world will fall at his feet and willingly submit to his leadership.

Here is what Paul-Henri Spaak^{iv} said, *“We do not want another committee, we have too many already. What we want is a man of sufficient stature to hold the allegiance of all people, and to lift us out of the economic morass into which we are sinking. Send us such a man, and be he god or devil, we will receive him.”*

God is even now preparing the world to accept this deceptive leader who will be seen to be the apparent returning Jesus Christ – wise, loving, peaceful yet powerful – but only deceptively so – disguising himself as an angel of light, and the world sans the church will buy the lie, lock, stock & barrel.

Next lesson – Lesson # 20

Rev. 6:3-4...The Second Seal Judgment / Rider on a Red Horse

ⁱ All of these are from Robert Thomas; Revelation 1-7; pp. 420-422

ⁱⁱ IBID; pg. 422

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted in John MacArthur sermon, “The Coming of World Peace” – Rev. 6:1-2; 1992

^{iv} Former Prime Minister of Belgium (1947 – 1949), and President of the UN General Assembly (1946-1947 & Secretary-general of NATO (1957 – 1961)