



Pilgrim Home Baptist Church

NT 2022 Q4 • JUDGMENT BEGINS • REVELATION 6:1-17 • 11/6/2022

MAIN POINT

The Book of Revelation depicts the final victory of God over Satan and the restoration of His original intention for His creation.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

To what degree do you believe justice is the end result of law enforcement and the legal system?

How do you feel when you sense someone has apparently avoided punishment for an inappropriate or illegal deed? Why do you feel that way?

One of John's purposes for writing Revelation was to reassure persecuted believers that God would one day set the record straight and bring correction—judgment—on the sinful world of those who disregarded His ways and Word. In the end, they would not “get away with” that which they had wrongfully done, regardless of appearances in the present. After a majestic vision of heaven in chapters 4–5, John observed the opening of the promised judgment in chapter 6.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 6:1-8 (SEALS 1-4).

What is the overall picture or sense you get from these verses? Why?

What symbolism do you see in the color of the horses and the descriptions of their riders?

The “four horsemen of the apocalypse” is perhaps the most widely known portion of the Book of Revelation. White often symbolizes purity or righteousness. That, combined with the conquering nature of the rider, leads some to see this rider as Christ. But, since the remaining horses and their riders all bring forth destruction, others see this first pair as destructive also. Victorious generals and kings often entered the city upon white steeds. Thus, some see this first seal as unleashing a militaristic spirit, perhaps even the Antichrist himself (who was victorious for a period of time), and thus the opening of a time of war.

The next rider wields a sword and drives peace from the earth while spurring the slaying of people—the outcome one would anticipate to follow one bent on conquering others. The spilling of blood in this violence is anticipated by the red color of the second horse.

The black horse suggests a dark and destructive time. Scarcity accompanies war, particularly in ancient times when invading armies supplied themselves from the crops of those they were invading and prevented normal agricultural activity. The famine conditions are depicted by the rider’s “scales” and the exorbitant prices for what was weighed out. The dry “quart” of this passage was little more than could be held in one’s cupped hands. One such quantity of wheat or three of barley (a less desirable grain) sold for a “denarius,” a full day’s wages for most people.

Life cannot long survive in the midst of famine, and when the fourth rider arrives, he is identified as death, followed closely behind by “Hades.” The horse of this rider is most often described as being pale in some form—ashen or the color of a corpse. This destructive duo were allowed to exercise their powers “over a fourth of the earth,” not necessarily over a geographic quadrant of the earth but on a quarter of people over the whole earth.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 6:9-11 (SEAL 5).

How would you describe in your own words the scene that unfolded when the fifth seal was opened?

What were the reasons that these believers “had been slaughtered”? What is the significance of each of these explanations?

Some have suggested that the request voiced in verse 10 does not seem to be Christian. Do you agree or disagree with that assessment? Why?

How would you interpret the response (v. 11) to the martyrs’ request?

The souls of those who had been martyred “because of the word of God and the testimony they had given” are found around the altar. These had been targeted because of their adherence to God’s words and their proclamation of it—the testimony they gave of God matched up with the testimony they received from God. While the judgment process has begun, the deaths of the faithful had neither been avenged nor ended, and those responsible still lived “on the earth.” Their inquiry was not so much about personal revenge as about concern for the reputation of God. To have slain these individuals required the killers to repudiate both the Word of God and His work in the lives of these believers. Had they accepted either, they would not have proceeded to take the lives they did.

In response, the martyrs “were each given a white robe,” a symbol in the Book of Revelation of blessedness and purity. They were likewise “told to rest a little while longer.” The time of full vindication had not yet arrived, but these faithful ones need not wait until it did to find their rest before the One who would make all things right in His time.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 6:12-17 (SEAL 6).

How would you classify the events described in verses 12-14? What conclusions might you draw if you began to experience such phenomena?

What implications do you draw from the listing of the various groups in verse 15 who “hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains”?

How do you interpret the fact that these people sought death over being in the presence of God?

Earthquakes (Ex. 19:18; Isa. 2:19; Hag. 2:6; Matt. 28:2), blackened sun (Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:31; Amos 8:9; Mark 13:24; Acts 2:20), blood-like moon (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20), falling stars (Isa. 34:4; Matt 24:29), and the sky like a rolled-up scroll (Isa. 34:4) all had previously been associated with the unmistakable work of God. These will be evidence of “the wrath of the Lamb” from which people of all walks of life shall flee in terror, begging the quivering mountains to collapse upon them, that they might be saved from “the face of the one seated on the throne.” God’s work to restore His creation to its original intent and design was in full swing.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

If people never really “get away with” wrongdoing, what should your response be when they appear to do so?

In the Old Testament, God often used “normal” events (plagues, famines, invading armies) to bring punishment upon nations. Verses 1-8 depict Him doing the same again. What impact, if any, might these have on the way you understand troubling global events?

To what degree does your adherence to the Word of God and your testimony about Him put you at odds with those who do not acknowledge Him?

How does reading passages like Revelation 6 inspire you to go out and share the gospel with those who don't yet know Jesus?

PRAYER

Thank God that the injustices and evil seen in the world will be corrected at the appropriate time in His wisdom. Pray for those who cannot presently stand before the throne to place their trust in Jesus.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 6:1-17

The breaking of the first four seals brings forth four horsemen of different colors. These riders, paralleling the chaos predicted in Mark 13, represent God's judgments through the upheavals of war and its devastating social consequences: violence, famine, pestilence, and death. The fifth seal is the plea of martyred saints for divine justice upon their oppressors. For now they are told, they must wait, for the number of the martyred of God's people is not yet complete.

A careful look at the sixth seal is important for understanding the literary structure and episodic sequence of Revelation. When broken, the sixth seal brings forth the typical signs of the end: a great earthquake, the blackening of the sun, the reddening (“blood red”) of the moon, and the falling of the stars of heaven (Matt. 24:29–31; Mark 13:24–27). Though Revelation is but a few chapters old, we are brought to the end of world history. The sky is split apart like a scroll; mountains and islands are moved. And the mighty as well as the lowly of the earth realize that the great day of God's (and the Lamb's) wrath has come, and nothing can save them.

The earthquake is a consistent sign in Revelation for the destruction that immediately precedes the end (see 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18–19) of history and the appearance of the Lord. The repeated references to the earthquake at strategic spots in Revelation do not mean that history itself repeatedly comes to an end but that John employed the well-known literary technique of

“recapitulation” (see Gen. 1–2), that is, the retelling of the same story from a different “angle” so as to focus upon other dimensions of and characters in the same story.

Thus, in Revelation we are repeatedly brought to the end of history and the time of Christ’s return. But John withheld his final (and fullest) description of this world’s end until the end of his document (19:1–22:5). In the meantime he used the literary technique (among others) of retelling to prepare his readers for both the traumas and hopes of human history. He wanted to prepare his readers for the fact of judgment coming at the hands of the enthroned Lamb of God (6:1–17), for both His protection of His people (7:1–17; 11:1) and their responsibility to bear witness to the earth regarding Him (10:1–11:13), for the redemptive purposes of judgment (8:6–9:21), for the coming persecution (11:7; 12:1–13:18), and for the finality of God’s judgments (15:1–18:24). There was much for John to explain regarding the suffering of the saints and the apparent triumph of evil, facts that seem to deny the Christian confession that Christ has been raised and enthroned as Lord. Does He protect His people? Will He truly come again? Why must we suffer, and “how long, Sovereign Lord,” must we wait? The merciful but mysterious ways of God with humankind require, for the sake of completeness, the retelling of the story of human history from several points of reference, replete with the certainties of both judgment and salvation through Christ.

The description of the judgments initiated by the breaking of the first six seals would no doubt tend to overwhelm John’s audience, but final wrath is not the lot of the people of God (see Rom. 8:35, 39; 1 Thess. 5:9). Therefore, John interrupted the sequence of judgments leading to the seventh seal to remind us that the people of God need not despair, for “the servants of our God” (7:3) have the promise of heaven.