

Revelation 6

The Seven Seals

1 Now 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!" 2 And 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.

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4 And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave[d] and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The Curse of Sin: 6 Seals

This third scene from the Book of Revelation begins one that has proven to be powerful in pop culture. Movies from Tombstone to Pale Rider, multiple comic books, and musicians from Metallica to Johnny Cash have been quick to adopt some of the imagery from Revelation 6.

There seems to be universal acknowledgement that the chapter is giving us symbolic imagery to help us to make sense of the many cataclysmic events that have defined the human experience throughout the history of the world.

My mind was taken to the opening of these six seals as I read this week about events that took place in the Great Rift Valley of Africa 150 years ago.

The native population and the environment in that beautiful corner of the world was being decimated year after year by the Arab slave trade, the European ivory trade, and natural disasters that resulted in famine. In one case a group of slave traders burst into a peaceful and functioning market town to murder over 400 women and children in retaliation for the disobedience of a single captured slave.

If we had lived through this traumatic time we would have thought it to be nothing less than “apocalyptic.” The English explorer who observed and recorded them, David Livingstone, could describe them as nothing less than the rampant reign of sin on the earth driven by human lust for power, disregard for the sanctity of life, and natural disaster.

The four horsemen of Revelation 6 are reminiscent of the horses in the book of Zechariah. Those horses are agents of God sent to “patrol the earth.”

The interesting thing to remember is that the curses of sin are unleashed by God Himself. God is judging sin and part of his judgement is that He has cursed the very earth on which we live. All of the horrible things that happen throughout all of history on every corner of the globe can be attributed to the curse of sin.

- What do the 4 horsemen of the first 4 seals represent?
- Where do you see the curse of sin being worked out in the news this week?
- Where do you see the curse of sin being worked out in your own life and in the lives of those around you?
- Knowing that sin in the world is responsible for those things, how does that cause you to respond differently to those situations in light of the Gospel?

The fifth seal is different.

We are introduced in this vision to saints who have been martyred for their faith. The cry out to God for vengeance and vindication, and what they receive are white robes and a two-fold

promise:

1. There will be more martyrs.
2. Vengeance is coming, so you can rest.

This seal tells us that martyrdom and suffering for faith has been a constant thread throughout the history of the church. It also tells us that God does not forget about those who are persecuted.

- What do the white robes represent?
- How can a persecuted Christian find rest?
- Why do you think that God has not yet avenged the death of martyrs on the earth?

The sixth seal is classic apocalyptic language. [See this article from the American Bible Society](#) if you have not previously read about the common themes of apocalyptic literature.

<http://bibleresources.americanbible.org/resource/apocalyptic-writing>

Notable places where you will find similar imagery are in Joel 3:15, Matthew 24-25 (and corresponding texts), Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah.

This is not literally speaking of the destruction of the earth, but is rather saying that some hugely significant event is about to take place. The church is being told that she is on the cusp of a great historical moment. We will find this great moment as we continue forward in the book of Revelation.

It's almost as if God is telling the martyrs "hold on a minute longer, you ain't seen nothing yet."

- What is building your sense of anticipation in this text?
- How could the curse of sin on the world be worse than it is already?
- Do you see God's grace at work in the midst of sin-induced suffering?
- How do you see the Gospel at work in suffering?