

The First Seal: The First Horseman

Revelation 6:1-2

The End Times

In my last post, we concluded our study of **Revelation 5**. In this post, we begin our journey in **Revelation 6** as the first six of the seven **seals** are opened. As you can quickly see, we will be taking each **seal** individually as the **Four View** interpreters have much to say about each.

Chapter 6 begins the account of the events that take place on the earth during the seven years of tribulation. **Futurist** interpreters believe that these events begin immediately after the rapture of the church in chapter 4. The sequence of **seals** marks a progression during the tribulation period. It is interesting to note that these signs follow in the exact same order as the signs that **Yeshua** speaks of in Matthew 24, where He is responding to His talmidim questions regarding the signs that will foretell His return and the end of the age. (These parallel verses from Matthew 24 will be included as we explore each **seal**.)

The First Seal

"Next I watched as the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living beings say in a thundering voice, 'Go!'"² I looked, and there in front of me was a white horse; its rider had a bow and was given a crown; and he rode off as a conqueror to conquer." ~ Revelation 6:1-2 (CJB)

The white horse and rider represent, for some, **Yeshua** setting out on His triumphant career, because later (in 19:11), **Yeshua** appears on a white horse. But to others (including me), the rider on the white horse is the Antichrist who inaugurates the seven years of the **Great Tribulation**. But this is not open war yet - war does not begin until the second seal. Rather, just as Satan presents himself as an angel of light, so the Antichrist presents himself first as the picture of goodness.

Matthew 24:3-5 (CJB): ***"When He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the talmidim came to Him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that you are coming, and that the 'olam hazeh is ending?'"⁴ Yeshua replied: 'Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray."***

Next I watched as the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living beings say in a thundering voice, 'Go!'" **Yeshua**, the **Lamb**, is found beginning to break the seals of the book. The mention of thunder tells us that the storm is about to come. This storm is denoted in Scripture by several different labels. It has been called **"the day of the Lord;" "the day of Jacob's trouble;" "the day of darkness;" "the day of vengeance of our God;" "the tribulation;"** and finally, **"the great tribulation."** When one of the angels says **"Go,"** a rider proceeds across the stage of time, summoned to go forth upon the earth.

I looked, and there in front of me was a white horse; its rider had a bow and was given a crown; and he rode off as a conqueror to conquer. He cannot be **Yeshua**, for **Yeshua** is holding the scroll and breaking the **seals**. Neither can the rider be made into a type of the world system. As Finis Dake explains:

It is clear that the symbol is one of an individual, for he has a bow and is given a crown and he goes forth "conquering and to conquer." This is in fulfillment of Dan. 7:8, 24-26; 8:8-10, 20-25; 11:35-45 as to the rise of the Antichrist among the ten kings of Revised Rome. Through conquest he will become supreme over them by the middle of the week. The giver of the crown is not mentioned here, but it merely symbolizes the rise of the Antichrist to power as king among the ten kings, through the operation of satanic powers, 2 Thess. 2:8-12; Rev. 13:1-4; Dan. 8:25; 11:36-39. It seems clear that this rider will cause the wars, famines, pestilences, death and hell of the following three seals. These blights always follow an ambitious conqueror. Antichrist is pictured as such in Dan. 7, 8, and 11.

When the Antichrist comes, he comes promising peace, a mock millennium, and whatever else he needs to promise to rally the nations behind him. Remember what Sha'ul said, ***"When people are saying, 'Everything is so peaceful and secure,' then destruction will suddenly come upon them, the way labor pains come upon***

a pregnant woman, and there is no way they will escape” ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:3 (CJB). It is significant that the Antichrist has a bow, but no arrows! He conquers with power yet peacefully. The tribulation begins with the Antichrist making a covenant with Israel by promising them peace and protection.

Special Comparative Note on Chapter 6:1-2 ¹

Historicist Approach:

Going back to chapter 4 and the subsequent breaking of the **seven seals** (chapters 6-8) Yochanan’s vision gives a glimpse of the conquests of Imperial Rome for three hundred years, culminating in Constantine’s establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire. The **seven trumpets** that follow (chapters 8-11) foretell the fall of Western and then the Eastern Roman Empires to the end of the world.

The **white horse** and **rider** of the **first seal** refer to the period of Roman imperialism from the death of Domitian (96 CE) to the peace made by Commodus with the Germans in 180 (CE). During this period, Rome expanded its military might until occupying most of the territories formerly ruled by the Babylonians, Medo-Peresians and Greece.

A few **Historicists**, including Matthew Henry and Adam Clarke, interpret the breaking of the **seven seals** essentially as the **Preterists**. The whole vision applies to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Preterist Approach:

Jay Adams suggests that the **seven seals** are in a row on the edge of the overlapping end of the **scroll** as I depicted in the picture in my last post. Consequently, it is impossible to open the **scroll** until all the **seals** are broken. In this view, nothing happens until the **seventh seal** is broken in chapter 8. (This makes sense physically, especially if you have ever seen a Torah Scroll. We’ll have to look at this a little closer as we go along.)

Since the holocaust of 70 CE was preceded by more than three years of war between the Jews and the Romans, some take the **rider** of the **white horse** as Vespasian or Titus at the head of the Roman armies. Alternatively, the rider could be **Yeshua** going forth to war against His murders through the calamities about to be revealed.

Futurist Approach:

Some **Futurists**, including Kuyper, Ladd and Morris, see the rider of the white horse as Yeshua going out to conquer with the Besorah (Gospel). Jennings on the other hand, rejects this adamantly as Yeshua’s reign will not bring war, famine or strife. Most **Futurists** believe that the **rider** of the **white horse** is the Antichrist. The crown is not a symbol of legitimate sovereignty (**diadema**), but a crown acquired by conquest (**stephanos**).

Idealist Approach:

To many **Idealists**, the **four horsemen** represent the universal sequence of conquest, war, famine, and death, oft repeated in history, but here revealed as proceeding from God’s sovereign purpose in judging corrupt humanity. This view could certainly be borne out by many of the prophets in the Tanakh calling Israel and Judah to repentance.

In my next post, the **Second Seal** is broken.

¹ Material in this section is taken from "Revelation: Four Views, Revised & Updated" by Steve Gregg