



**REVELATION 6:1-8 STUDY GUIDE**  
**(REST OF CHAPTER 6 WILL BE OUT SOON)**

Again, the biggest debate about the book of Revelation and how we understand it revolves around its **structure**. The views of interpreters of Revelation vary greatly concerning the opening of the seven seals:

- Many “**futurists**” (who understand the events of Revelation 4–22 to refer to events still future to 21st-century readers) believe that the opening of the first seal here begins the “Great Tribulation.” They might say, “I’m glad I won’t be around for any of this. Jesus will rescue me from it.” Those in Christ will be raptured out before the “fireworks” of the seals.  
(NOTE: Most Christians and churches, it seems, fall into this camp.)
- Many “**idealists**” (who believe the events of Revelation 4–22 range over the **entire span** of time between the first and second comings of Christ) believe that some of the seals refer to ongoing realities in the inter-advent age. The first four seals clearly form a group, since they bring forth four horses and horsemen.  
(NOTE: This is a very small percentage of Christians and church on this!)

***I (Pastor Darin) used to believe wholeheartedly the way of the “futurists.” Yet, now I see it differently. I would fall more into the “idealist” camp mentioned above.***

Yes, the events in Revelation 6-19 talk about the end times—when Jesus comes back. But they also seem more to apply to **different periods, including our own time throughout history**. In simple words, I think Revelation 6-19 shows us important things that happened from when Jesus first came to when he comes again.

**(PASTORAL NOTE:** Whether you agree with me or not, it is okay! What matters is that we know Jesus is coming and are call to live for his glory and share the Gospel / evangelize is heightened as we consider the Second Coming! It is okay to agree-to-disagree with charity. This isn’t a salvation issue. God isn’t going to not love us because we disagree on this. Let’s love each other on these issues!)

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**EXAMPLE:**

Think of it like recording a **college football game** from various seats in the stadium. You have cameras at different places:

- One camera captures the whole game from the middle of the field, while another gets a close-up from the end zone, showing how plays develop.
- Another camera is on the other end, capturing the game as it comes toward that side.
- And there’s even a camera in a blimp, giving a unique overhead view.

Although each camera shows the same game and the same plays, they each provide a different perspective.

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## WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

Likewise, in the Book of Revelation, the author, John, is telling us about events that happen over a long-time span. He might talk about different moments in history, like a play in the football game and then skip to another moment. Yet, he always ends by describing how things turn out.

In short, understanding Revelation is like watching a game from different angles. It helps us see the big picture and the details, even though the order of events might not be in a straight line.

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In the book of Revelation, John describes certain events happening multiple times. Some people believe there are seven (7) similar sections where John talks about these events.

Regardless of how many times this occurs, the main idea remains the same:

***John talks about the things that happen in the history of the church between Jesus' first and second comings.***

These things are like common occurrences that people experience during this time. When John finishes describing one section—which includes the Second Coming of Jesus and the end of history—he goes back to the beginning to describe it all over again. He does this from a different perspective each time.

The book of Revelation is organized around three sets of seven judgments. There are, it seems:

- seven **seal** judgments,
- followed by seven **trumpet** judgments,
- & then seven **bowl** judgments.

According to the idea of looking back and repeating, these judgments describe events that happen ***throughout history between Jesus' two comings***. The difference is that sometimes John describes a smaller, less severe part of God's judgment. And, at other times, he describes the same judgment in a more complete and powerful way.

All three sets of seven judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls) show things that happen repeatedly in history between Jesus' first and second comings. They all lead to the end of human history, where we see the final judgment of those who don't believe, the rescue of God's people, and the full coming of Jesus' kingdom.

The reason why the ***trumpet*** judgments seem ***less*** severe and the ***bowl*** judgments seem ***more*** powerful is that they show that something that happens partly in one place or time can also happen fully and everywhere at a different time.

**In short, contrary to the idea that Revelation is only about events right before Jesus' second coming, it actually has multiple sections.** Each section goes over the same time period, from Jesus' first coming to His second coming and the end of history. Each section has a series of similar visions that become more intense as they get closer to the end.

Think of it like cameras set up during a football game. Each section of the book is like a different camera. They all show the same time period, just from different angles. Even though John uses phrases like "**after this**" or "**after these things**" to move from one vision to the next, these phrases

show the order in which John saw the visions, not necessarily the order in which they happen in history. They're like connecting words in a story, not a strict timeline as many believe.

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### **INTRODUCTION TO THE SEAL JUDGMENTS (6:1)**

There's no doubt that these judgments come directly from Jesus Christ. When each seal is opened, its judgment is released on the earth by the "Lamb" (6:1).

What's more, each of the **four horsemen** is called forth by one of the **four living creatures** surrounding the Lamb on his throne. It's super-important to remember that **angels**, like these four living creatures, always carry out God's commands, wishes, and decrees.

Psalm 103 emphasizes this truth:

***"Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will"*** (vv. 20-21).

The key point here is that these events aren't accidents of nature, nor did they originate from Satan. They come from God and are intended to prompt people everywhere to turn to him, to bring punishment upon those who don't believe, & to refine and strengthen the faith of God's followers.

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### **THE FIRST SEAL (6:2)**

Three passages from the Old Testament share some similarities with Revelation 6:1-8 and its depiction of the four horsemen of judgment. These passages are:

- Leviticus 26:18-28,
- Zechariah 6:1-8, &
- Ezekiel 14:12-23

In each of these texts, there is a threat of judgment similar to what is described in Revelation 6—either against Israel or its pagan neighbors.

There is a significant debate about the ***identity of the first horseman***.

1. Some suggest that it represents the triumphant **spread of the gospel** throughout the world.
2. Others argue that the horseman symbolizes the **anti-Christ**.
3. While some propose that it is **Jesus** himself.

Let's explore the reasons supporting the idea that the ***first horseman is Jesus***.

- **#1 - The text could be referencing Psalm 45:3-5, which portrays an Israelite king who defeats his enemies with a bow and arrows.** This king rides forth victoriously "for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness" (Psalm 45:4, ESV). According to Hebrews 1:8, this psalm is messianic and points to Jesus.

- **#2 - In Revelation 19:11-16, Jesus wears crowns and rides a white horse while defeating his enemies.** However, it's important to note that there are differences as well. The rider in Revelation 6 carries a "bow" and wears a wreath of victory, whereas the rider in Revelation 19 wields a sharp two-edged sword and wears many diadems—symbols of sovereignty.
- **#3 - In Revelation 14:14, Jesus is described as sitting on a white cloud with a golden crown on his head.** Throughout Revelation, Jesus is often associated with the concept of "conquering" (Rev. 3:21; 5:5; 17:14).
- **#4 - Aside from this particular passage, the color "white" appears 14 times in Revelation and consistently symbolizes righteousness or is linked to the holiness of God.** Those who support this view also highlight that the white horseman, unlike the other three, is not explicitly stated to be the agent of judgment. The term "conquering" could be interpreted positively.

On the other hand, some argue that *the first horseman is a Satanic imitation or parody of Jesus*, representing evil. The Anti-Christ, perhaps. Here are their reasons for this interpretation:

- **#1 - In Revelation 13, it's evident that one of Satan's tactics is to mimic Christ in appearance and actions.** The language of "conquering" is also used in Revelation to describe the beast's oppression and persecution of God's people (11:7; 13:7).
- **Theologian Beale points out that the horsemen form a distinct group within the text, similar to the first four trumpets and bowls in relation to the remaining ones.** Since the first four trumpets and bowls represent parallel judgments, it's likely that the same parallelism applies to the horsemen (Beale 376).

**BOTTOM-LINE:** The similarities between the first horseman and the other three are too important to make a radical distinction between their natures. For instance:

- each horseman is summoned by one of the four creatures,
- each horseman appears in response to this call,
- the color and the carried object of each horse and rider indicate the type of distress they bring,
- and the same statement of authorization ("was given to him") is used for the first two horsemen.

The "**bow**" symbolizes an intention to conquer through military power and tyranny. Nowhere in Revelation or the New Testament does Jesus wield a bow. Rather, he is usually depicted with a sword.

Additionally, it seems odd that Christ would both initiate the seal and be its content. There could be a parallel in Revelation 9:7, where demonic agents of judgment are described as "horses prepared for battle" with "crowns" on their heads. The same authorization clause ("was given to them | 9:3, 5) is used.

***Although it's not definitive, it appears that the first horseman is a Satanic imitation of Jesus (19:11-16) sent by God ("it was given to him" is a typical expression of divine authorization in Revelation [see: Rev. 6:11; 7:2; 8:2-3; 9:1,3,5; 11:2-3; 12:14; chapter 13; etc.] to incite war on the earth.***

There are also several Old Testament texts where "bow and arrows" symbolize divine chastisement (Deuteronomy 32:42; Isaiah 34:6; Habakkuk 3:9; Lamentations 3:12-13; Psalm 7:13-14, etc.).

Thus, the rider on the white horse symbolizes all forms of tyranny and oppression associated with war.

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### **THE SECOND SEAL (6:3-4)**

If the initial rider brings about war on the planet, the other three reveal distinct outcomes of war.

The second horseman has the ability **to remove peace from the world**, leading to people causing harm to one another. This could also involve mistreatment of Christians (compare with Matthew 10:34), as the term "**slay**" is exactly "**slaughter**" which John consistently uses to describe the death of Jesus or the sacrifice of his followers (Rev. 5:6, 9, 12; 6:9; 13:8; 18:24).

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### **THE THIRD SEAL (6:5-6)**

The third horseman is responsible for **causing famine**.

In the olden days, "scales" were used to measure and distribute food during times when there wasn't enough (similar to Leviticus 26:26, 2 Kings 7:1, Ezekiel 4:10,16).

Then, a voice (likely Christ's? Consider its source!) gives a command that seems to limit how severe the famine will be. Important foods like "wheat" and "barley" will still be around. A "denarius" was what people earned in a day (like in Matthew 20:2) back then. A "quart of wheat" was sufficient for one person for a day, and "three quarts of barley" would last three days. Wheat was the quality grain, while barley was a lesser version (Ex - Name brand vs. store brand?!).

These prices mentioned are quite a bit higher than the usual rates in the Roman Empire at that time— around 8-16x more expensive. The fact that "oil" and "wine" (which symbolize olive trees and vines) remain unaffected also shows that the famine's severity is limited. This could mean that sparing oil and wine is a sign of God's kindness during this time of judgment.

The overall picture here is a mix of not having enough and having more than enough—there's an uneven balance in the supply of food and life's necessities.

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### **THE FOURTH SEAL (6:7-8)**

Unlike the other riders, the fourth one has a name: "Death." After him comes "Hades," which is where the dead go. Two important things to understand here.

**First, this rider has power from God to cause death in four ways:**

- war (sword),
- lack of food (famine),
- diseases (often referred to as "death"),

- and wild animals.

**Second, although these punishments are severe, they only affect a quarter or ¼ of the planet.** This initial, partial judgment is meant to prepare us for the final and ultimate judgment that comes with the seventh event in each of the three series of woes.

Wilcock explains: "The idea of wiping out a quarter of humanity might seem like an immense disaster, but it's worth noting that this doesn't necessarily refer to a single massive event. After all, everyone eventually dies, and what's likely meant here is that a significant number of those deaths are the unnecessary ones caused by war, famine, and similar evils" (*The Message of Revelation*, 72).

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#### **APPLICATION:**

**Once again, we see God's control over history.** These judgments from the four horsemen are a wakeup call for people. They are a call for everyone, everywhere, to turn away from their wrongdoings.

So, what should we do? Is it right to give our money, time, and effort to help those who are suffering in this way?

Yes.

Even though diseases are a result of God's judgment due to human wrongdoing, Jesus still healed the sick. Our commitment to Christ often shows in how willing we are to give up things to help those who are hungry and suffering (see Luke 3:11; James 2:14-17).

Earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and the destruction from war can be seen as God's judgment because of humanity's disobedience and worship of false gods. However, we still have a responsibility to do everything we can to reduce suffering wherever we find it and to encourage everyone, everywhere, to change their ways.

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#### **CONCLUSION / APPLICATION**

Lastly, it's really important for us to remember two things about the many times when judgments were poured out on the earth, leading to suffering and death:

- **#1 - God doesn't want you to think he's avoiding responsibility.** The judgments, like the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, are either released by Jesus Himself or by angels who serve God and do what he wants. But this doesn't always mean God is directly causing all the suffering and death on earth.
- **#2 - God has varying levels of responsibility for these judgments in Revelation.**
  - **A. Sometimes, God directly brings his anger and causes the destruction of his enemies.** For instance, think about how Christ is shown at his Second Coming: "Out of his [Christ's] mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Revelation 19:15).

- **B. In other cases, God simply “let’s go” of his common grace.** Common grace is when the Holy Spirit stops holding back or limiting the harmful and sinful actions of unbelievers. Much of the suffering and destruction in Revelation happens because God chooses to stop stopping people and allows their wickedness to run wild.
- **C. Finally, there's the part where God lets Satan cause famine, disease, suffering, and death on the earth.** This is a lot like what happened with Job. God didn't directly harm Job's family, property, or health. But He did let Satan hurt Job. We can see this in Revelation 12 where it says that Satan "was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev. 12:9). Also, "But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" (Rev. 12:12b).

So, in all these ways, God is still in control of everything that happens. He sometimes directly brings his anger. Other times, his judgment happens when He stops holding back wicked people. And sometimes, he just allows Satan to cause chaos.

But here's something we can be sure of: **God's anger never falls on His children.** The ones he's angry with are the "those who dwell on the earth," which usually refers to non-Christians in Revelation.

It might be easy to feel really down about all this. With all these disasters and the bad behavior and false worship around us, I sometimes feel like crying just like John did in Revelation 5. But we should be thankful that I'm told:

*"Don't cry anymore! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb who was killed and came back to life, and saved people from all over the world, He's the one who's allowed to open the book of history and make things happen the right way. Jesus wins. And because we're His, we're like a kingdom of priests for God, and we win too!"*

So, the terrifying things about God's anger and judgment in Revelation should help you see two important things: gratitude and telling others about Jesus!

- **#1 - Because you've trusted Jesus to take the punishment you deserved; you should feel super thankful for being forgiven.** Thank you for saving me, Lord!
- **#2 - Lots of people are still under God's anger.** If there's ever a reason to share the good news about Jesus with people around us, this is it. May we be faithful to the task!