

Lesson 10
Revelation 6
The Beginning of the End

Memory verse: “I tell you the truth, some of you who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matthew 16:28 NIV)

In chapter 4, God is seated on His throne and then in chapter 5, we see God holds out in His hand a little scroll sealed with seven seals. The little scroll was the title deed to the universe and the only one who was worthy and able to open it was the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, the lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David. The scene then is God and God is about to unleash judgment. Around His throne is lightning and thunder. In the midst of this there is glorious worship of God by the redeemed and raptured church and by the angels.

The worship described in Revelation 4—5 is preparation for the wrath described in Revelation 6—19. It seems strange to us that worship and judgment should go together, but this is because we do not fully understand either the holiness of God or the sinfulness of man. Nor do we grasp the total picture of what God wants to accomplish and how the forces of evil have opposed Him. God is longsuffering, but eventually He must judge sin and vindicate His servants.

According to Daniel 9:27, seven years are assigned to Israel in God’s prophetic calendar, beginning with the signing of an agreement with the world dictator (the Antichrist), and ending with Christ’s return to earth to judge evil and establish His kingdom. It is this tribulation period that is described in Revelation 6—19. By referring to John’s outline (Rev. 1), you will see that his description is in three parts: the first three and a half years (Rev. 6—9), the events at the middle of the period (Rev. 10—14), and the last three and a half years (Rev. 15—19).

What is so significant about the middle of the tribulation? That is when the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and becomes their persecutor instead of their protector (Dan. 9:27).

As you study these fourteen action-filled chapters, keep in mind that John wrote to encourage God’s people in every age of history. He was not only writing prophecy that would be fulfilled in the end times, but he was also writing great theology and dramatically revealing the character of God and the principles of His kingdom. These chapters describe the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, the New Jerusalem and Babylon, and no matter what “key” a student may use to unlock Revelation, he cannot help but see the exalted King of kings as He vindicates His people and gives victory to His over-comers.

Since the church never knows when Christ will return, each generation must live in expectancy of His coming. Therefore the book of Revelation must be able to communicate truth to each generation, not just to the people who will be alive when these events occur. Verses like Revelation 13:9; 16:15; and 22:7, 18–20 all indicate the timelessness of John’s message. This also explains why the apostle used so much symbolism, for symbols never lose their meaning. In every era of its history, the church has had to contend with Babylon (compare Rev. 18:4 with Jer. 50—51) and Antichrist (see 1 John 2:18ff.). Revelation 6—19 is merely the climax of this conflict.

In the beginning of chapter 6, John recorded the opening of the first four seals, and as each seal was opened, one of the four living creatures summoned a rider on a horse. (“Come and see” should read, “Come!”) In other words, events take place on earth because of the sovereign direction of God in heaven.

The horse imagery is probably related to the vision described in Zechariah 1:7–17. Horses represent God’s activity on earth, the forces He uses to accomplish His divine purposes. The centre of His program is Israel, particularly the city of Jerusalem. (Jerusalem is mentioned thirty-nine times in Zech.) God has a covenant purpose for Israel, and that purpose will be fulfilled just as He promised.

Things to learn: 1) Coming of world peace in the tribulation. 2) God’s great day of wrath. 3) Fear of the wrath to come.

Discussion questions:

1) The opening of the first four seals marks a time of retribution or tribulation, yet, the rider on the white horse has a bow without arrows which signifies peace in the opening of the first seal. Why and what is the opening of the second seal telling us? (Do read Daniel 7 and commentary provided, Dan. 9:20-27 and Matthew 24 about events leading to and in the tribulation.)

Q2. What will happen when the third and fourth seal are opened?

Q3. When will be the timeline of the Tribulation with the opening of the fifth and sixth seal and what responses will be found in heaven and on earth? (Also refer to commentary to Daniel 7 as provided).