



REVELATION

the WISDOM JOURNEY
LESSON 767

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

REVELATION 6:1–8:1

We Christians have been delivered from God's wrath in the coming tribulation period. Yet beginning with Revelation 6, the Bible gives us details of that period that we might learn more of God's justice and grace and become more zealous in proclaiming the gospel.

As we set sail into chapter 6 of the book of Revelation, John's vision begins to give us vivid details of the coming, seven-year tribulation period.

If you have been sailing with me on this Wisdom Journey, you know that we have come across many passages that talk about this day of the Lord, a time of unparalleled judgment coming upon the earth, when God will judge humanity, vindicate His holiness, fulfill His promises, prepare the nation of Israel for Christ's return, and—in the midst of it all—bring millions of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation to faith in Jesus Christ.

This time of tribulation, when everything seems to go crazy, is all under God's sovereign control. He will guide the nations of the world into the harbor of His perfect plan.

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The church will be kept from this divine judgment by means of the rapture, which precedes the tribulation. Jesus will come *for us*, and we will be raptured to meet Him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4); then following the tribulation, Jesus will come *with us* (Revelation 19) as He comes down to earth to establish His millennial kingdom.

So, there is no sign of the church on earth from chapter 4 through chapter 19, because these chapters describe what is going to happen between the rapture and the Lord's return to earth.

In our last session, we watched as a scroll sealed with seven seals was given to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. As each seal is opened, various judgments of God are released upon the earth. Here in Revelation 6:2, John describes what comes forth when Jesus opens the *first seal*:

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.*

This is the first of four horsemen to appear, and this is not Jesus Christ; this is the Antichrist. He will be “crowned” by the world, which he will “conquer.” Now initially he is going to bring global peace, as the prophet Daniel prophesies.¹ He is going to establish a covenant that will settle the Jerusalem question and even allow a new Jewish temple to be rebuilt. And beloved, Israel is already prepared and waiting for an opportunity to rebuild their temple.

The opening of the *second seal* is described next. This second horseman brings an end to world peace. This is where the story turns ugly and blood begins to flow—and it is going to flow until chapter 19, when Jesus returns. Verse 4 says this rider on a red horse is “permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another.” The covenant with Israel will be broken, and war will envelop the world. This is when the great battle described in Ezekiel 38–39 takes place.

The *third seal* is opened, and a rider on a black horse comes galloping into view. He brings with him famine and death. Food will become scarce; verse 6 says, “A quart of wheat [will cost] a denarius.” A denarius was a day’s wages, and that will all be spent for just a little grain.

The *fourth seal* follows, and a rider appears on a “pale horse,” which indicates an unhealthy appearance. Verse 8 explains why:

*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.*

Death comes sweeping in to take the lives of a quarter of the world’s population through war, famine, disease, and even wild beasts. Today that would mean more than two billion people will die in a matter of months. Corpses will be piled high in every city. John describes Hades following Death like a shadow, scooping up as it were the condemned souls of the dead.

This is God’s warning that death is not the end of suffering for those who reject Jesus Christ. Hades is that place where the souls of unbelievers go after death—a place of conscious suffering. At the final judgment, Revelation 20 tells us that Hades will empty its inhabitants into the lake of fire, which is eternal hell.

The *fifth seal* is then opened, and the scene shifts to heaven in verse 9. Here John sees “the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.”

This tells us that people will come to faith in Christ after the rapture. They will suffer persecution, and many will be martyred for their faith. They are shown in verse 10 asking the Lord how long it will be before their deaths are avenged. Do not miss this: these people are in heaven, but they are aware of what is happening on earth. We will talk more about that later.

Then the *sixth seal* is opened, and earth experiences one disaster after another, as described in verses 12–14. A mega earthquake occurs; the sun is darkened; the moon becomes red like blood; and the “stars [fall] to the earth,” a

reference to meteors or even asteroids pummeling the earth.

John describes the sky in verse 14 as vanishing “like a scroll that is being rolled up”—as if the atmosphere is shriveling up like paper. John writes, “Every mountain and island was removed from its place.” Whatever you learned in geography class will no longer matter!

As you can imagine, the response on earth is absolute terror. Humanity will realize these judgments are coming from God, and they will pray—but not to Him. Verse 16 shows defiant mankind “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.’” As one writer puts it, “They would rather hide from God in fear than run to Him in faith.”²

Chapter 7 then acts as an interlude, as John pauses to describe two groups of people who are saved during the tribulation.

Verse 3 introduces us to 144,000 “servants of . . . God” who are sealed “on their foreheads.” These are Jewish converts—12,000 from each of the twelve tribes—who have come to faith in Jesus Christ after the rapture. With this passage, we can begin to see God uniquely—and primarily—working with the Jewish people during the tribulation.

We are not told what kind of “seal” they have, but we do know that they are empowered and protected by Christ. In fact, they are going to survive the tribulation, because they show up again in chapter 14. These 144,000 Jewish evangelists will be God’s ambassadors throughout the tribulation period.

The second group of people now shown to us are in heaven. Verses 9-17 describe a “great multitude.” They come “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (verse 9), and they are “standing before the throne,” shouting with joy, “Salvation belongs to our God!” (verse 10).

We do not have to wonder who these people are; John says here in verse 14 that one of the elders before the throne tells him:

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

These are people who were saved during the tribulation, but they were also martyred for their faith in Christ.

After this interlude, chapter 8 begins with the opening of the *seventh seal*. This is followed by a half hour of silence in heaven. This is a silence of anticipation for what is coming. And what is coming? This final seal contains all the remaining judgments from God. The seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowls of wrath are all contained in this seventh seal—and they are about to be unleashed on Planet Earth.

And that is where we will start on our next Wisdom Journey.

How does knowing that God is sovereign over the tribulation encourage you to trust Him in difficult circumstances today?

How can you strengthen your faith to resist fear when you see conflicts and disasters around the world, knowing that God's plan is unfolding?

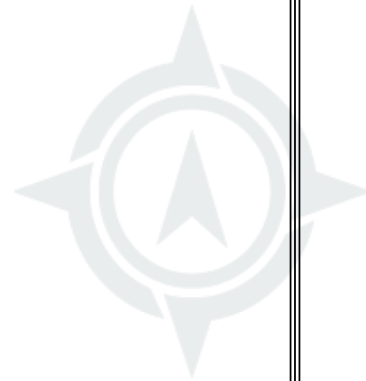
What steps can you take to ensure that you remain anchored in Christ amidst the growing spiritual deception that will precede the tribulation?

How can you respond to God's warnings today to make sure you are living with eternity in mind?

How does the imagery of judgment (war, famine, death) impact your understanding of God's holiness and justice?

Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?



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¹Daniel 9:27.

²Sam Gordon, *Revelation: Worthy Is the Lamb* (Ambassador, 2000), 166.