



We have just covered the scene in God's throne room where Christ as the Lamb is worthy of opening the seals of the scroll of end-time events given by God. In chapter six, Christ begins to open the seals of this scroll, for books as we know them were not invented at that time--only in the second century.

John writes, "Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, 'Come and see.' And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:1-2).

Bible commentators are quite puzzled about the identity of this first horseman. Most think it has to do with war, some believe it refers to Christ's return, and others consider it as the gospel being preached. It is amazing that they don't use Christ's Olivet Prophecy to interpret and tie down the true meaning of these seven seals. It is apparent God has hidden these vital end-time prophecies from them.

In the Olivet Prophecy found in Mt. 24, Mr. 13 and Luke 21 there is a sequence of seven events which matches the content of the seven seals, including the first four seals where horsemen ride different colored horses and picture end-time happenings.

The horseman on the white horse represents the *false prophets* who will arise and deceive many, some pretending to represent Christ, as detailed in Mt. 24:4-5; Mr. 13:5-6 and Lk. 21:8. He is on a white horse because it depicts the white color of "righteousness," but here used to disguise itself as the true religion. Notice examples of using white such as the white clerical collar or the Pope's white clothing. So its religious leaders pretend to be "ministers of righteousness." But as Paul warned, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light [light is depicted as white]. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Also, the False Prophet is described as having "two horns of a lamb" yet speaking as a dragon (Rev. 13:11), so, although he is unconverted, he depicts himself as a white lamb.

Next, John writes, "When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come and see.' Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword" (Rev. 6:3-4). This horseman on the red horse corresponds to the second sign in the Olivet Prophecy--major wars and insurrections will intensify on earth (Mt. 24:6-7; Mr. 13:7-8; Lk. 21:9).

Then comes the third horseman: "When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard 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 the wine'" (Rev. 6:5-6).

So the third horseman riding a black horse mainly symbolizes famines and corresponds to the third sign in the Olivet Prophecy: "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places" (Mt. 24:7; Mr. 13:8; Lk. 21:11). As Mounce brings out, "A voice... announces famine prices for wheat and barley, and warns against hurting the oil and wine. The balance indicates a time of scarcity when the basic commodities of life are measured out at greatly inflated prices...The denarius was a Roman silver coin equivalent to the daily wage of a working man. For a day's work a man could buy only enough wheat for himself or enough of the less nutritious barley for three. The price appears to be ten to twelve times what it should have been" (p. 144).

Next is the fourth horseman on a pale horse. "When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth" (Rev. 6:7-8). This corresponds to pestilences or plagues (Mt. 24:7; Mr. 13:8; Lk. 21:11). Morris comments, "The Greek *chloros* (from which we get our word 'chlorine') denotes 'yellowish green'...Death in this context will signify pestilence" (p. 107). It will have the power to afflict a fourth of the earth. So these

four horsemen and the opening of the first four seals correspond to the first four events Christ mentions in the Olivet Prophecy. Jesus says they are "the beginning of sorrows" (Mt. 24:8). Literally, it means the beginning of birth pangs. As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* brings out, "These things, Jesus said, will be the beginning of birth pains. As a pregnant woman's birth pains indicate that her child will soon be born, so these universal conflicts and catastrophes will mean *the end* of this inter-advent Age [the period between the two advents] is near."

The fifth seal is now broken: "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 testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed" (Rev. 6:9-11). This fifth seal relates to the fifth event described by Christ in the Olivet Prophecy--religious persecution primarily against the saints: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another" (Mt. 24:9-10).

This depiction in Revelation has the faithful brethren slain as being "under the altar" crying out to God for vindication. G. E. Ladd explains, "In the present instance, the altar is clearly the altar of sacrifice where sacrificial blood was poured. The fact that John saw the souls of the martyrs *under the altar* has nothing to do with the state of the dead...it is merely a vivid way of picturing the fact that they had been martyred in the name of their God. In the Old Testament ritual blood of sacrificial victims was poured out at the base of the altar (Lev. 4:7). The souls of martyrs are seen under the altar as though they had been sacrificed upon the altar and their blood poured out at its base. Christian thought often employs the language of sacrificial death. Facing death, the apostle Paul wrote, 'For I am already on the point of being sacrificed' (2 Tim. 4:6). At an earlier date, also facing possible death, he had written, 'Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon

the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad' (Phil. 2:17). Thus Christian martyrs are viewed as sacrifices offered to God. In fact, they were slain on earth and their blood wet the ground, but in Christian faith, the sacrifice was really made in heaven where their souls [or lives] were offered at the heavenly altar" (p. 103).

This religious persecution begins the period known as the great tribulation. As Jesus stated, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Mt. 24:21-22). Our booklet, *"The Book of Revelation Unveiled"* says, "The primary targets of this carnage will be those 'who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ'" (Rev. 12:17). Additional prophecies explain that this time of great tribulation and persecution will also be visited upon God's people who are the modern physical descendants of the 12 tribes of ancient Israel" (p. 15).

Now comes the opening of the sixth seal: "I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" (Rev. 6:12-17).

This sixth seal corresponds to the sixth description in the Olivet Prophecy: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Mt. 24:29). The "stars" falling normally refer to a shower of meteorites pummeling the earth.

So these heavenly signs appear *after* the period of the great tribulation but *before* the start of the Day of the Lord. That is why the great tribulation represents Satan's time of wrath. As Rev. 12:12-13, "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time. Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child."

Before the seventh seal is opened there is what is called an *interlude*, a *parenthesis*, or a chapter *inset* in the sequence of events. Two visions are given to John to record, one about the sealing of the servants of God before the day of the wrath of the Lamb. The other is a picture of the triumph of the saints rejoicing before the throne of God.

John continues, "After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.' And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed [twelve thousand of every tribe, with Joseph and Manasseh mentioned but not Dan—probably because of its tendency toward idolatry (Jud. 18:30; 1 K. 12:29)]. After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.' Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'Who are these arrayed in

white robes, and where did they come from?' And I said to him, Sir, you know.' So he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:1-17).

So the first group, the 144,000, are "servants" (Gk. *doulos*) of God who are protected from the wrath of the Lamb. Our booklet on Revelation mentions, "This sealing has to do with receiving God's Holy Spirit so one may become spiritually converted. As Eph. 1:13-14 says, 'Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [which] is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession' (NIV). The 144,000 of Rev. 7 are mentioned again in Rev. 14, where it becomes clear that these spiritual 'firstfruits' will have repented and been converted before the beginning of the Day of the Lord. They are described as being redeemed and without fault. They are represented as having a relationship both with God the Father and Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God" (p. 37).

Then, the booklet on Revelation focuses on the second group, the innumerable multitude, saying, "They are converted servants of God having suffered from and—as seems to be implied—been converted during the first 2 ½ years of the Great Tribulation, before the beginning of the Day of the Lord....Unmistakably clear in Revelation 7 is that a great harvest of true and faithful Christians will occur during the first years of the great tribulation period. That immense spiritual harvest will be reaped not only from the literal tribes of Israel but from the other nations and peoples throughout the earth. The powerful preaching of God's two witnesses (chap. 11) will no doubt contribute greatly to the conversion of this vast number during that frightening and deadly time" (p. 38). Perhaps they are distinguished from the first group because they do have to suffer martyrdom during that time."