

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The opening of the seals in Chapter 6 is the first of the three great judgments to fall on those remaining on the earth after the saints are called up. The other two judgments are the trumpets of Chapters 8 and 9, and the bowls, or vials, of Chapter 16.

It is difficult to read of the terrible disasters overtaking the human race in these chapters. But it is even more painful to realize the hardened condition of mankind at the end when their sinfulness is fully exposed. God has hardened men's hearts before. Romans 1:29, speaking of the Gentiles, says, *“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”* But man was not wholly abandoned. He still had the testimony of creation, the witness of scripture and the prophets, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit to lead him to seek God.

But now the sins of men have reached their fullness just as the sins of the Amorites would have to reach their fullness before they were given up to conquest by Abraham's descendants (Gen. 15:16). The Holy Spirit – the One Who restrains lawlessness – has departed with the church. Men are presented with great lies which they are all too eager to believe. *“Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2 Thess. 2:11-12).

The Father in love has sacrificed His own Son to draw sinners to Him but most people have rejected the Savior. At the end of God's forbearance, those who **would not** repent and believe now **cannot** repent and believe. All that remains is for God to establish His justice before the heavenly witnesses who look on.

The three judgments can be difficult to interpret in their apparent randomness. But perhaps we can discern a pattern. For the sinner today, the way to God follows this sequence:

1. A sinner gains **knowledge** of his sinful condition and seeks reconciliation with

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God.

2. The **proclamation** of the gospel leads to repentance and salvation through faith in Christ for those who believe.
3. God's love and blessing are **poured out** into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5)

But in the book of Revelation, after the day of grace has drawn to its end, there is a terrible parallel.

1. The unsealing of a scroll reveals **knowledge**. In Chapter 6, men are forced to confront their inborn wickedness. When the peace upheld by God is withdrawn, they slay each other. When famine comes they turn it to profit. They murder those who testify to them from the Word of God. And, amazingly, they know beyond doubt of God's existence and His displeasure. Like the demons of James 2:19 they believe – and shudder. But knowing all this, they nevertheless **will not** and **cannot** seek God. They desperately try to hide from Him like Adam and Eve in the garden. “Who can stand?” they cry in the face of God's judgment.
2. Trumpets are used by heralds to draw attention to **proclamations**. The trumpets of Chapter 9 bring dreadful disasters to a third of the earth. It seems that all creation which formerly testified of God's love now testifies of His wrath. Men will remember that God's promise to Noah of continuing seasons would last only as long as the earth itself and realize the end is being announced. Yet despite their grief and terror, they **will not** and **cannot** repent of their works, as we are told in Revelation 9:20-21.
3. In light of this, our just God **will not** and **cannot** contain His wrath any longer. It is **poured out** of seven bowls or vials onto the earth in Chapter 16. Men curse God and once again refuse to repent (16:11).

The bowls are drained; God's wrath is spent. "It is done," He declares in 16:17. How blessed are we who hear through faith the same words, "It is finished," from God's Son on the cross as the wrath of God is poured on Him in our stead! How blessed that we can declare God to be just by acknowledging our sins and repenting of them (Luke 7:29) and then receive His mercy!

Notes on Chapter 6

6:1 We are given a "backstage" view of events on earth being directed from heaven. All the acts and scenes of life, from the trivial to the tragic, have their roots in God's providence. We cannot understand them all now but someday we will.

6:2 (First seal) The identity of the white horseman is debated among Bible scholars. He resembles the conquering Christ of Chapter 19 but that entrance occurs at the end of the tribulation, not the beginning. The apparently bloodless victory implies the rider may be the Antichrist who is given inherent authority over the earth (13:7).

6:4 (Second seal) Peace is not the natural condition of men. It is conferred by God and can be taken away by Him. When men take peace for granted (1 Thess. 5:3) they are most in danger of losing it.

6:6 (Third seal) The measure here is the Greek *choinix*, a dry measure of about a quart. A *denarius* would be a day's wage for a laborer. The implication is that food is commanding exorbitant prices in the midst of famine. Oil and wine were more commonly consumed by the rich. No disaster completely interrupts the scales of commerce, eliminates greed, or denies the wealthy their delicacies.

6:8 (Fourth seal) The Greek word for pale signifies a sickly green. The massive death toll here, a quarter of humanity, is an argument against *preterism*, the view that the tribulation described in Revelation describes persecution experienced by the church in the first century. While it was no doubt a trying time, there is no historical record of calamities approaching the

apocalyptic scale we read here. We hold the *futurist* view, that Revelation from Chapter 4 onward takes place in a future time.

The participation of "wild beasts" in the carnage is a final reversal of the dominion given to Adam over the beasts of the earth. We may find it hard to picture hordes of lions or other predators decimating the human population. But if we expand the term "beasts" to all non-human life including insects and bacteria the idea becomes much more conceivable.

6:9-11 (Fifth seal) The martyrs here are most likely Jewish saints killed on the earth during the tribulation. Their call for vengeance against their murderers has a distinctly Old Testament viewpoint. Think of David making similar pleas in the Psalms. Their impatience for justice to be executed is an echo of John's eagerness to see the scroll unsealed in Chapter 5. The Lord counsels patience as He proceeds with his plan of judgment on His own timetable.

6:12-14 (Six seal) The destruction in these verses might appear to be the end of the cosmos foretold in 2 Peter 3. But it appears to come before that end. It is more likely a series of meteor showers and natural disasters of sufficient severity to convince men that the end has come (but not having the effect of leading men to repentance).

6:15-16 The gospel first took root among the humble and lowly of the earth: "*For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth*" (1 Cor. 1:26). In contrast, judgment here seems to fall on the rich and powerful first although no unbelievers, even slaves, are spared.

Note that we have not reached the seventh seal. It is opened in Chapter 8 and encompasses the seven trumpets.