



February 25th, 2026

Week 15 Part 1- Chapter 6:1-17 & 8

The First Seal

Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” ²I looked, and there was a white horse. Its rider held a bow; a crown was given to him, and he went out as a conqueror in order to conquer.

The Second Seal

³When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” ⁴Then another horse went out, a fiery red one, and its rider was allowed to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another. And a large sword was given to him.

The Third Seal

⁵When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and there was a black horse. Its rider held a set of scales in his hand. ⁶Then I heard something like a voice among the four living creatures say, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not harm the oil and the wine.”

The Fourth Seal

⁷When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” ⁸And I looked, and there was a pale green horse. Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following after him. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill by the sword, by famine, by plague, and by the wild animals of the earth.

The Fifth Seal

⁹When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given. ¹⁰They cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, the one who is holy and true, how long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?” ¹¹So they were each given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters, who were going to be killed just as they had been.

The Sixth Seal

¹²Then I saw him open the sixth seal. A violent earthquake occurred; the sun turned black like sackcloth made of hair; the entire moon became like blood; ¹³the stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind; ¹⁴the sky was split apart like a scroll being rolled up; and every mountain and island was moved from its place.

¹⁵Then the kings of the earth, the nobles, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷because the great day of their wrath has come! And who is able to stand?”

- Revelation 6:1-17 -

The Seventh Seal

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ²Then I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God; seven trumpets were given to them. ³Another angel, with a golden incense burner, came and stood at the altar. He was given a large amount of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar in front of the throne.

⁴The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up in the presence of God from the angel’s hand. ⁵The angel took

It is at this point the work of interpretation gets much more difficult. What do all the symbols and images mean? And here the work of living the interpretation gets much more difficult, not because the message is so complicated, but because it is so spiritually demanding.

It turns out that, as many commentators argue, “the breaking of the seven seals” is the part of Revelation that best explains what is going on in our world.

Can this seven-scene vision explain the why to what is happening in the world? The text certainly connects with our world. Who alive in our time does not know about conquest and violence and famine and death and earthquakes? But explain them?

Remember: things _____ . There is more to reality than meets the unaided senses. There is more to this present moment than we can know through our intellect and emotions. There is more to the flow of history than can be deduced by even the most insightful sociologist or historian. And it is the purpose, the pastoral purpose, of Revelation 6 and following to reveal that further, as hard as that is to bear.

It is important to read Revelation 6 (and following) wearing the set of glasses shaped by Revelation 4 and 5. Without the vision of Revelation 4 and 5—the Lamb is on the throne—the vision of Revelation 6 and following would be *unbearable*. It is hard enough to bear with the perspective of Revelation 4 and 5. But without it we would totally miss the point.

Revelation 6 (and following) is addressed to one of the major questions raised by the affirmation of Revelation 4 and 5.

Powerful images, life-changing affirmations! And, nearly everything around us calls it all into question. “The Lamb is on the throne!” Right—where have you been these last weeks, John? Do not the harsh and horrifying realities of history negate that affirmation? Revelation 1:6: “Jesus Christ is ruler of the kings and queens of the earth.” Yeah, sure. Look at the world, John. Look. And John says, “Yes, look. Things are not as they seem.”

In chapter 6 the Lamb breaks the seals of the scroll of history. That is, the Lamb, the slain Lamb, opens up and puts into effect the secret of history. The breaking of the seals opens up a very different view of the flow of history.

Seven seals. Seals are on the scroll not to prevent us from knowing what is in the scroll. After all, as John says in Revelation 5:1, the scroll is written on the inside and outside. Seals are on the scroll as signs of _____. In the first century,

documents were sealed not to prevent their contents from being known, but to say that only the one authorized by the author could open them. Jesus Christ, because he was slain, is authorized to break the seals.

In Revelation 6 and following, he breaks them one at a time. It is when all seven seals are broken that the point of the vision becomes clear.

It is this: there are many different reasons for the changes, upheavals, revolutions of history. One of the biggest reasons is the _____ of the followers of the Lamb. Things are not as they seem.

Notice that in each of the seven seal-breaking scenes someone prays. In seals one through four, the four living creatures that surround the throne cry out, "**Come!**" In seal five, disciples who gave their lives in the cause of the gospel cry out, "**How long, O, Lord?**"

In seal six, the unbelieving world— people who reject Jesus the Lamb as ruler cry out, not to God, but to the mountains and rocks, "**Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.**" And in seal seven, there is a half-hour of silence as the prayers of the saints ascend to the throne.

History is moved by many forces. But one of the greatest forces is *prayer*. Not that the four living creatures or the martyrs and saints pray for war or violence or famine or death or earthquakes. Hardly!

It's just that in praying for Jesus Christ—the reigning Lamb—to fully establish his kingdom on earth, things start happening. The kingdom begins to break in, changing things, upsetting the status quo, unmasking idols, flushing out evil...and meeting resistance. And the followers of the Lamb get caught in the crunch.

The vision of the breaking of seals is cosmic in every sense of the word. We know this because of John's use of the number _____. It is the number of the _____: four winds, four corners, etc. John speaks of the four living creatures that represent the whole of animate creation. He speaks of four horsemen and of a fourth of the earth (6:8). All to say that the cry of creation and the prayers of the Lamb's followers have cosmic impact.

"Come!" cry the four living creatures.

The question is: "*Who, or what, are they calling?*"

Some suggest they are calling out to John to come and see the vision. (Some ancient manuscripts have the verbs “come and see”). But John is already there, inside the door into heaven. He does not need to be called.

Others suggest the four living creatures are calling for the four horsemen. Why? Why would they do that? Why would creation call for forces that ruin creation?

Then whom are they calling? They are calling for the _____ at the center of the throne to come and establish his kingdom. They are praying the second line of the Lord’s Prayer:

“Come, your kingdom!”

The whole book of Revelation is bracketed by the verb “come”:

- 1:7—“Look! He is coming.”
- 22:7—“Look! I am coming quickly.”
- 22:12—“Look! I am coming quickly.”
- 22:20—“Yes, I am coming.”

Again, note carefully: not _____, but _____. The command is not, “*Look! He is going to come.*” But “*Look! He is coming even now. He is in the process of coming even now.*”

So, in 22:17 we hear the Spirit of God say, “**Come.**” And we hear the Bride of the Lamb say, “**Come.**” And John says, “**Let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’**” Let the one who hears that he is coming say, “**Come.**” The four living creatures are calling for Jesus Christ to come and fully establish the kingdom of God.

That is, creation is crying out for release from its suffering. Is this not what the apostle Paul develops in the eighth chapter of Romans? He begins in Romans 8:18: “**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**”

And then Paul goes on to speak of creation standing on tiptoe groaning, longing to be set free from corruption (8:22). And he speaks of believers groaning, longing for the redemption of our bodies (8:23). And he speaks of the Holy Spirit groaning (8:26).

The four living creatures are not calling for the four horsemen. They are calling for Jesus Christ the Lamb, the ruler of the kings and queens of earth, to come.

Why then the four horsemen? Why do they come? Did they get it wrong? Did they think they were being called? What gives? One of the unseen mysteries of history—that is what gives.

The four horsemen represent the kinds of things that happen when Jesus and his kingdom begin to press in on the world. *Not that Jesus' coming causes all this misery and terror.* But when Jesus and His kingdom—when the Lamb and His way—come, there is _____ and _____ resulting in misery and terror.

The first horse, a white horse: ***“And he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer”*** (6:2). Who, or what, is this first horseman?

John seems to have in mind the four horses of Zechariah 1:8-15, who are kept together, being of the same character. *“The first rider represents a satanic force attempting to defeat and oppress believers spiritually through deception, persecution, or both (11:7; 13:7).”* In Jesus' “discourse on the end” recorded in Matthew 24, the first sign of his coming is false messiahs, false prophets, who are able to mislead even the elect (24:4-5).

The first horse is the power of evil, _____ Jesus—white, crown, etc.— seeking to conquer. John is telling us that as Jesus comes, as he keeps coming, evil, masquerading as light, opposes him and seeks to conquer human minds.

John says, ***“A crown was given to him”*** (6:2). Given. This is crucial to observe. Evil is not in charge. Evil is not on the throne. Evil can only operate if it is given permission to do so. *Evil is on a leash.* We will come back to this later on.

For now, hang on to what John is showing us. Evil can only operate by authorization from the throne. And in the mystery of things, this divine authorization somehow serves _____ for bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth.

The second horse, a red horse: ***“And to him who sat on it,”*** says John, ***“it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that people should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him”*** (6:4). The second horse naturally follows on the heels of the first. Red is the symbol of *blood*. As evil seeks to assert itself against the kingship of the Lamb, it generates civil strife; it generates war.

Spiritual evil (the worst kind there is) always eventually reverts to _____. Wars—be they between nations or between individuals—are *always* due to spiritual conflict. One or both sides has lost the wisdom

and strength to go the way of _____. One or both sides have lost spiritual courage and have taken up the way of the beast.

The third horse, a black horse: "And he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand" (6:5). John hears a voice coming from the center of the 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" (6:6). The pair of scales points to the fact that when violence and war assert themselves, food will have to be weighed and rationed.

A quart of wheat is the amount needed for one person for one day. A denarius is one day's wage. The bare necessities cost a whole day's wage! How then can a person provide for a family? Yet the rich will get what they want. The price of wine is not affected. The third horse represents _____, leading to hunger and famine.

The fourth horse, an ashen horse (pale green). This time the rider has a name: "Death." And, says John, Hades will follow him. Hades is the place where those who die go—the Grave. It is an awful image. Death riding through the earth, the Grave, now personified, is gathering up the corpses.

The first four seals teach us that ever since Jesus Christ, the Lamb, was installed on the throne of the universe, *"the four horsemen of Apocalypse"* have been trying to take him and his people down. As creation cries out for Jesus to "come," the forces, which do not want him and his kingdom to come, *rise up in opposition.*

It is very sobering to observe that the twentieth century began and ended with attempts at ethnic cleansing. Yes, the twentieth century witnessed the greatest advancement in technology, but it began and is ending with great evil.

The century began with attempted genocide, when angry young Turks murdered 1.5 million Armenians. No nation even raised its voice in protest at that time. To this day the U. S. Congress has yet to officially recognize that the massacre took place (though the Canadian Parliament formally acknowledged the event in 2004).

In the middle of the century Adolph Hitler had six million Jews slaughtered. Stalin had even more Russians slaughtered. Mao Tse tung had even more Chinese slaughtered. At the end of the century several hundred thousand people of the former Yugoslavia were murdered. This time the world spoke up, but in speaking up still opted for returning violence for violence.

It is believed that more than six million people died as a direct or indirect result of war in the last decade of twentieth century alone:

Afghanistan 1,050,000
Algeria 80,000-100,000
Colombia 40,000-250,000
India/Kashmir 30,000-50,000
Iraq 100,000-250,000
Myanmar 130,000-500,000
Rwanda 500,000-800,000
Sierra Leone 15,000-20,000
Sri Lanka 55,000-70,000
Sudan 1.5 million

The numbers are deeply unsettling. Even more disturbing is that an estimated 1.5 million of them were children. Of the children who survived those conflicts, some 4 million were disabled, maimed, blinded or brain-damaged. The survivors' stories are so horrific that it is difficult for most of us to even fathom the human dimension behind these statistics.

In Rwanda, some children who escaped being hacked to death by machete wielding-aggressors survived for days in piles of corpses before being found by rescue workers. Psychologists later interviewed 207 children who survived the Rwandan genocide. They found that 56 percent of the children interviewed had seen other children participate in the killings. Forty-two percent had seen children killing children.

"The Lamb is on the throne."

Does this mean this is Jesus' doing? Since he sits on the throne of the universe, is this the Lamb's doing? *No!*

But it is due to Jesus' coming and bringing his kingdom and being resisted. It is due to the Lamb and his way being resisted. As long as he and his way are ignored or resisted, the four horsemen will continue to ride. As long as violence is glorified and marketed, the world will continue to suffer violence. God does not _____.

The rise of violence is due directly to humanity _____ and _____ of nonviolent suffering. As long as there are video games in which players blow up human figures at the rate of 10 to 15 a minute, as long as hockey players can smash the faces of opponents into glass walls without penalties being called by the referee—what do we expect to happen in the streets and in schools? None of

that is Jesus' way. All of it is a violation of our humanity. All of it is anti-kingdom. *All of it is an affront to the Holy God.*

So creation cries out, "**Come!**" And he is coming even now, but being resisted. And we hear the hooves of the four horses pounding the surface of the globe.

"It was given," says John (6:2). **"It was granted."** This is all being allowed by the throne. Which means the chaos and violence are not signs that the Lamb is not on the throne. They are signs of the _____.

"Here is the way to peace," he says: *"My way, the way of suffering love. If you do not want my way, I will grant you your way."*