



Revelation 6

Pre-Game Show

In Revelation 6, the Apostle John remains in great throne room of heaven where he entered beginning in chapter 4. Amazed at the glory of God, John sees a scroll in the right hand of the One enthroned. The scroll is God's last will and testament; it contains His wishes for blessing His people and punishing His enemies. It is sealed with seven seals (blobs of melted wax sealed with a die or perhaps the insignia of ring.) The seven seals communicate its importance and its completion. This is God's irrevocable will. Jesus, the slain Lamb standing, is the only One in all creation qualified to put into play the contents of the will. He accomplished this by His death, burial, and resurrection. Keep in mind that what happens in Revelation 6 is not the contents of the scroll; simply the preliminaries that take place prior to the actual execution of the will. In Revelation 6, Jesus opens the first six seals.

In a world immersed in evil . . .

In vv. 1-8, the four horsemen should be seen as a *group*; the images of horsemen would have reminded the Jewish believers (remember that John himself was Jewish) of their Hebrew heritage. Zechariah 1:8-17 & 6:1-8 speak of horsemen who patrol the earth looking for peace. Revelation 6 is the counter-image—these are horsemen of military conquest, civil war, famine, & death. When evil is unleashed it, its destructiveness is seen in all its disgust. Ezekiel 14:21 summarizes how God judged Israel for her idolatry—*“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals!*” In Revelation 6, it's not just Israel, but the whole world! Ezekiel said that in Israel's suffering, God was punishing evil doers and refining the faith of believers. The same is true Revelation 6. God is using the horrors of military conquest (the white horse); the terrors of domestic and civil war (the red horse); the dreadfulness of famine (the black horse); and the reality of death (the pale horse) to punish evil-doers and purify the faith of believers. When Jesus died on the Cross, His suffering had this very effect on the two thieves. The one was hardened in his rebellion; while the other was melted in repentance, seeking the Lord's grace. One event: two purposes.

. . . the God who keeps His people secure . . .

In vv. 9-11, the scene shifts from earth to heaven. Many believers have been victims of worldly evil, giving their lives for the Gospel. They remain under the altar—kept by the power of God—awaiting the final return of Christ, wanting to see His fame, reputation, honor, and glory vindicated. This is why they pray, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true!” They’re not cry babies wanting personal revenge. They want all of creation to see the glory of God! They’re ready for the new heavens and the new earth! Theirs is a prayer of hope and trust.

Overcoming is not just something that martyrs do. Our entire living needs to reflect our fierce loyalty to the Lamb. Those who cannot be squeezed into the world’s mold; those who are unshakably committed to God’s Word; those who are thoroughly equipped to serve; those who love God’s authentic community—these are ones who are a threat to the empires of this world. The lukewarm believers of Laodicea—Satan loves this bunch. The fierce Philadelphians or Smyrnians—Satan detests these. Question: Does our loyalty to Christ unnerve the enemy of Christ?

. . . is in complete and total control!

In vv. 12-17, the number (see v. 11) is complete. The wrath of evil against God’s people is eclipsed by the wrath of the Lamb against God’s enemies! The evil rulers and earth-dwellers gladly prefer being buried by mountains and rocks rather than facing the unshielded wrath of the Lamb! Don Carson has summarized this chapter:

1. This is my Father’s world. Never for a moment think that God has lost control. The picture here—even in the portraits most grim and gruesome—is of the Sovereign Lord who says, “It is given!”
2. This world stands under His judgment. The wrath of God already abides. It’s not whether God is waiting which way we will go. We’ve already staked out our rebellion! But God has graciously offered deliverance through the Lamb. “He laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”
3. Every instance of judgment is a preview of ultimate judgment
4. There is no higher court of appeal.
5. The slain Lamb of Revelation 5 is our only hope!

Many of you may be asking, “So, if this is a prophecy, when is all this supposed to take place?” Here’s what I’m seeing from these vv.—seals #1-5 have been happening since the death, burial, resurrection, AND ascension of Christ! God’s people are secure Seal #6 is yet to come!