Revelation 6

The Seals Are Opened: Who Is Able to Stand?

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

The Lamb who was slain is the One who opens the judgments. Conquest, war, famine and death ride out — but only as far as they are permitted. The martyrs are heard, the proud are humbled, and the chapter ends with the only question that matters: who is able to stand?

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

REVELATION 6 (KJV), MARKED

Gold God — His character & actions
Green Command / instruction
Sky Key repeated word
Rose Sin / warning
Violet Promise / blessing
Amber Time / place / contrast

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Marked in the text

- **v1** ▲ the Lamb opened one of the seals
- **v1** ▮▮ Come and see *(every occurrence)*
- **v2** ◷ a white horse
- **v2** ⚠ a crown was given unto him
- **v2** ⚠ conquering, and to conquer
- **v4** ◷ another horse that was red
- **v4** ⚠ to take peace from the earth
- **v4** ⚠ a great sword
- **v5** ◷ a black horse
- **v5** ⚠ a pair of balances
- **v6** ▮▮ see thou hurt not the oil and the wine
- **v8** ◷ a pale horse
- **v8** ⚠ Death, and Hell followed with him
- **v8** ◷ the fourth part of the earth
- **v9** ◷ under the altar
- **v9** ★ slain for the word of God
- **v9** ★ the testimony which they held
- **v10** ▲ How long, O Lord, holy and true
- **v11** ★ white robes were given unto every one of them
- **v11** ★ rest yet for a little season
- **v12** ◷ a great earthquake
- **v12** ◷ the moon became as blood
- **v14** ◷ the heaven departed as a scroll
- **v15** ⚠ hid themselves
- **v16** ⚠ hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne
- **v16** ▲ the wrath of the Lamb
- **v17** ⚠ the great day of his wrath is come
- **v17** ⚠ who shall be able to stand

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 6:2 (KJV)

2 And I saw, and behold ◷ a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and ⚠ a crown was given unto him: and he went forth ⚠ conquering, and to conquer.

Setting

In chapter 5 the Lamb took the sealed book from the hand of the One on the throne. Now He begins to break the seals. Heaven has been singing; now the earth begins to shake. Every judgment in this chapter starts with the Lamb's hand: "I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals" (v1).

Structure

- vv1–2 — **first seal, the white horse:** one of the living creatures says, "as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.'" (v1). "Behold, 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" (v2).
- vv3–4 — **second seal, the red horse:** "to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him" (v4).
- vv5–6 — **third seal, the black horse:** the rider has "a pair of scales in his hand" (v5). A voice from among the living creatures: "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine" (v6).

- vv7–8 — **fourth seal, the ashen horse:** "he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth" (v8).
- vv9–11 — **fifth seal, the martyrs:** "underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained" (v9). They cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (v10). Each is given a white robe and told "that they should rest for a little while longer," until their fellow servants and brethren are completed (v11).
- vv12–17 — **sixth seal, the great day:** "a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (v12). Stars fall "as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind" (v13). "The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places" (v14). Kings, great men, commanders, the rich, the strong, slave and free — all "hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains" (v15), crying, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (vv16–17).

Repeated words

seal (vv1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12); Come (vv1, 3, 5, 7); horse (vv2, 4, 5, 8); he who sat on it (vv2, 4, 5, 8); was given / was granted (vv2, 4, 8, 11); earth (vv4, 8, 10, 13, 15); wrath (vv16, 17); the Lamb (vv1, 16).

Contrasts

the Lamb in heaven, worshiped (ch. 5) ⟷ the wrath of the Lamb on earth (v16). A rider who conquers with a bow and a crown (v2) ⟷ the Lamb who conquered by being slain (5:5–6). The martyrs crying "How long?" (v10) ⟷ given white robes and told to rest (v11). The saints slain on earth (v9) ⟷ the persecutors hiding from the throne (vv15–16). Kings and great men ⟷ slaves — all equally hiding (v15). Men who wanted no God ⟷ men begging the rocks to hide them from God (v16).

Chapter theme (my words)

The Lamb who was slain is the One who opens the judgments. Conquest, war, famine and death ride out — but only as far as they are permitted. The martyrs are heard, the proud are humbled, and the chapter ends with the only question that matters: who is able to stand?

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 6:1 (KJV)

[1]And I saw when ▲ the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, 🔊 Come and see.

How to read the seals

Guzik holds a futurist view: the seals begin the judgments of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:24–27), the Great Tribulation, and he speaks of the antichrist's rise coming "after He takes His church from this earth" (2 Thess 2:6–7). He does not read the seals, trumpets and bowls as strictly chronological; Bullinger, in Guzik, calls the seals a "Summary of the judgments distributed over the whole book." Other Christians read them differently: historicists see the course of church and Roman history, preterists see judgment on first-century Jerusalem and Rome, and idealists see conditions true of every age between Christ's comings. Guzik grants that these conditions — conquest, war, famine, death — have always been with us; in the Tribulation they are intensified. Many readers also notice how closely the order follows Jesus' words on the Mount of Olives: false christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, and signs in the sun and moon (Matt 24:4–29).

"Come" (vv1, 3, 5, 7)

The KJV reads "Come and see," as if John were being invited closer; the NASB follows manuscripts that read simply "Come." Guzik notes it could be translated "go forth" — each living creature summons a rider onto the stage.

The white horse (vv1–2)

Who is this rider? Some have seen Christ, since Jesus rides a white horse in 19:11; others see the triumph of the gospel. Guzik rejects the identification with Christ. This rider carries a bow, not the sword of the Word (19:15); his crown is *given* to him; and he heads a parade of war, famine and death. Guzik calls him "a satanic dictator who imitates Jesus" — the antichrist, conquering at first without war. Jennings, in Guzik: "His reign shall not bring war, famine, and strife in its train." Yet war, famine and death follow right behind him.

The red horse (vv3–4)

Peace is taken from the earth, "and that men would slay one another." Guzik: peace is God's gift, not the natural state of the world. Take His restraining hand away, and men turn on each other. This authority is "directly or indirectly, the judgment of God."

The black horse (vv5–6)

Scales mean rationing. A denarius was a day's wage (Matt 20:2). Guzik: the prices are about twelve times normal — a whole day's work buys bread for one person. Walvoord: "a time of famine when life will be reduced to the barest necessities." Yet the oil and wine are not touched. Luxury remains for those who can afford it, while the poor go hungry.

The ashen horse (vv7–8)

The color is *chlōros* — the sickly green-gray of a corpse. Death rides, and Hades, the grave, follows to collect. A fourth of the earth dies by sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts — the same four judgments named in Ezek 14:21. Walvoord, in Guzik: a judgment that takes a fourth of the earth's population has not been seen since the days of Noah. Yet even here "authority was given to them." Guzik: God "still holds the scroll and opens the seals."

The martyrs (vv9–11)

Under the altar is where the blood of sacrifices was poured (Lev 4:7). These lives were poured out for God. Guzik reads them as all who have died for the word of God. Their cry for justice is not bitterness; God Himself promised to avenge innocent blood (Gen 4:10; Deut 32:43). Guzik notes that "the number of" in some translations is supplied, and the text may speak of their fellow servants being made complete in character: "It is character – the way that one lives – that makes a martyr, not the way that one dies." God's answer is not "never," but "a little while longer" — and a white robe in the meantime.

The sixth seal (vv12–17)

Earthquake, black sun, blood moon, falling stars, a sky rolled up like a scroll — the language of the prophets for the Day of the Lord (Isa 34:4; Joel 2:10, 31; Zeph 1:14–16). Guzik: the images are "real, but poetic." The most striking thing is human: from kings to slaves, everyone hides — like Adam among the trees (Gen 3:8) — and they know exactly whom they are hiding from (Hos 10:8; Luke 23:30). Torrance, in Guzik, calls it "the wrath of sacrificial love." Swete: sinners dread "the revealed presence of God" more than death. "The wrath of the Lamb" — the gentlest of images joined to the most terrifying word. The One who was slain for sinners is the One who will judge those who refuse Him (John 5:22).

"Who is able to stand?" (v17)

Guzik's answer: only the one who is justified — who stands in grace by faith (Rom 5:1–2; 1 Cor 15:1; 1 Pet 5:12). Chapter 7 answers the same question with a sealed and countless multitude standing before the throne (7:9).

Word study (Greek)

- **seal — *sphragis* (G4973):** a wax seal; each one broken releases the next judgment.
- **horse — *hippos* (G2462):** a horse — a picture of war and swift conquest.
- **bow — *toxon* (G5115):** an archer's bow.
- **crown — *stephanos* (G4735):** a victor's wreath, here *given* to him.
- **conquering — *nikaō* (G3528):** to conquer, overcome — the same verb used of the Lamb in 5:5.
- **red — *pyrros* (G4450):** fiery red, the color of blood and fire.
- **sword — *machaira* (G3162):** a large knife or short sword, for slaughter.
- **pair of scales — *zygos* (G2218):** a yoke, or the balance beam of a scale.
- **quart — *choinix* (G5518):** about a quart of grain — one man's daily ration.
- **denarius — *dēnarion* (G1220):** a silver coin, a laborer's daily wage.
- **ashen — *chlōros* (G5515):** pale green; the color of a corpse.
- **Hades — *hadēs* (G86):** the realm of the dead, the grave.
- **altar — *thysiastērion* (G2379):** the altar of sacrifice.

- **testimony — *martyria* (G3141):** witness; the root of our word "martyr."
- **avenge — *ekdikeō* (G1556):** to vindicate, to carry out justice.
- **wrath — *orgē* (G3709):** settled, righteous anger.
- **stand — *histēmi* (G2476):** to stand, hold one's ground.

Cross-references

Gen 3:8; Gen 4:10; Lev 4:7; Lev 26:21–26; Deut 32:43; Ps 2:12; Ps 76:7; Isa 2:19–21; Isa 13:9–10; Isa 34:4; Ezek 14:21; Hos 10:8; Joel 2:10–11, 31; Nah 1:6; Zeph 1:14–16; Zech 6:1–8; Mal 3:2; Matt 24:4–29; Luke 18:7–8; Luke 23:30; Rom 5:1–2, 9; 2 Thess 1:6–10; 2 Thess 2:3–8; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 Thess 5:9; Rev 7:9–14; Rev 19:11–15.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 6:9 (KJV)

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

Command to obey — keep the testimony

The souls under the altar were slain "because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained" (v9). Maintained — held on to. I'm not asked to die today, but I am asked to keep holding on to what I know is true when it costs me something. For a man inside, that may mean keeping his Bible open on a tier where it gets him mocked. For a man in recovery, it means saying "Jesus" out loud in rooms where people would rather he said "higher power."

Sin to confess — hiding from God

The kings and slaves of v15 are doing what every sinner has done since Eden: hiding. I hide too — behind busyness, behind excuses, behind a good reputation. I confess that I would rather run to the rocks than to the Lamb. But the Lamb is the only safe place to run.

Warning to heed — the wrath of the Lamb is real

I like the Lamb who is meek and was slain. But the same Lamb will judge (v16). If I soften that, I make the cross small. The men I disciple need to hear both: He will take your judgment on Himself, or you will face it from Him.

Promise to trust — "a little while longer."

The martyrs' cry was heard. God did not say "no"; He said "rest a little while longer," and gave them white robes (v11). To the man who has been wronged — abused, betrayed, falsely accused — God has not forgotten your blood or your tears. Justice is coming, and you do not have to take it into your own hands (Rom 12:19).

Example to follow — the martyrs who left vengeance to God

They didn't take revenge; they took their cry to the throne (v10). That is where I take mine. A man who learns to pray "How long, O Lord?" instead of plotting payback is a free man, even behind bars.

Worship

The Lamb holds the seals. War, famine and death ride only as far as they are permitted. Nothing in this chapter is out of control. I worship the Lord, "holy and true" (v10), who will judge the world in righteousness.

Prayer

Lord, holy and true, You hold the book and You break the seals. When the world is shaking, let me stand in You and not in myself. Keep me from hiding from You — I run to You instead. Give me courage to maintain my testimony, patience to leave vengeance to You, and urgency for every man I know who isn't ready to stand. Thank You that the Lamb who will judge is the Lamb who was slain for me. Amen.