

*Some years ago, a young man got into trouble with the law and his lawyer persuaded the judge to give him a suspended sentence. Years later, this lawyer was elected judge, and the same man who he had once defended had committed another criminal offense. When the man was brought to court to stand before the judge, he hoped the judge, who had once defended him, might be merciful, but the judge said, “Then I was your advocate, now I am your judge and I must hold you fully accountable for what you have done.”*

In this present age, Jesus offers to be our advocate – our Savior, but for those who reject Him, He will someday be their judge and **who will be able to stand before Him?** That’s a good question, and that same question just so happens to be the last words in our passage this morning – a passage filled with judgment.

We have made it to **Revelation 6**, where the scene shifts from the activities of worship in heaven back to the earth. If you recall in **Chapter 5**, the Apostle John visited the throne room of God and he noticed a scroll with seven seals in the hand of God the Father. This scroll was like a title deed to the world, it symbolized ownership, and the Father wanted to pass it on like an inheritance to the rightful heir. One person was found worthy to take the scroll, and He was the Son of God – the Lion of Judah, the Lamb who was slain to take away the sin of the world. Jesus took the scroll from the Father, ownership was transferred, and now He begins a step-by-step process, beginning in **Chapter 6**, of preparing the world for His second coming, and this process is what we call “the Tribulation period.”

Now to get a better understanding of the Tribulation period, I feel it is necessary we first look at a passage found in **Daniel 9**. In this passage, the prophet Daniel is praying for his people – the Jews, for they are in captivity in Babylon, and while he is still praying, God sends His angel Gabriel to give some him encouraging words – a prophecy, and this is what Gabriel says to Daniel beginning with **verse 24**,

**“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.”**

This passage starts with the words “**seventy weeks**” but don’t let that word “**weeks**” mislead you. In Hebrew it is “*shabua*” which means a period of seven. Just like we might use the word “*dozen*” to mean twelve – weeks refers to seven. So, **seventy weeks** literally means *seventy sevens*, and in context, it is seventy sevens of years, or if you do your math, it adds up to 490 years.

So, 490 years have been set for Daniel's **people** – the Jews and his **holy city** – that being Jerusalem. This is very important. These 490 years relate specifically to Israel – not the church. The church is not in focus here.

God has set 490 years for the Jews, for a purpose – that being **“to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.”** Taken as a whole, this speaks to Israel's eventual repentance and forgiveness of sin by turning to Jesus as their Messiah and the establishment of the Lord's earthly kingdom at His second coming where everything is made right. That's the eventual outcome after the 490 years have run their course, and fortunately for us, we are told when the calendar started. Look at **verse 25**.

**“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.”**

Here, Gabriel reveals two out of the three segments of this 490-year period. The first segment, is **seven weeks**, or we could say *“seven sevens”* which equates to 49 years and it begins with the **decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem** – not just the temple, but the city, with its buildings, and streets, a trench and its walls. This decree was made in 445 B.C. when King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission, safe passage, and the necessary supplies to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. It likely took 49 years to rebuild Jerusalem after it had been completely desolate for several decades. So, we have a good firm starting point to work from.

The second segment given by Gabriel is **sixty-two weeks** or *“sixty-two sevens”* or 434 years. It begins after the first segment and it extends up to the triumphal entry where Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and publicly declares Himself to be the **Messiah**. So, adding these first two segments together, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the Lord's triumphal entry into that same city would be *“sixty-nine sevens”* or 483 years.

**What did we start with?** We started with 490 years, and 483 years have come and gone, so that leaves us with only one week or seven years remaining. **So, where are they?** **What happened to the remaining seven years?** Well, we are given the answer in the first part of the next verse – **verse 26**.

**“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing,”**

So, after the second segment, after the **sixty-two weeks** are completed, we are told the **Messiah** will be **cut off** – executed, crucified, and it's at that point the calendar stops with seven years remaining.

The Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and as a consequence, they were set aside for a season to usher in the church age. Jesus talked about this with the Jewish religious leaders in **Matthew 21:42-43**.

**<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the LORD, and it was marvelous in our eyes’? <sup>43</sup>“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.**

Their loss was our gain, and so the church would now carry out God's mission to reach a lost and dying world who does not know Him. The church is now front and center, but after the church is raptured, after the church age has come and gone, then the calendar starts back up again with the remaining seven years called “*the time of Jacob's trouble,*” or what we refer to as “*the Tribulation period*” – a time where God's judgment and wrath is poured out upon the world – literally it will be hell on earth, but it will serve a divine purpose – that being to bring those who are lost, and more specifically the Jewish people, to repentance and salvation. That is the purpose after the 490 years have run their full course.

Now, before we begin to look at the Tribulation period, I want to point out that we are going to see God's judgment and wrath poured out in a series of sevens – first, there are the seven seal judgments that come from the scroll, and for the most part, the seals encompass the entire Tribulation period, but toward the end, flowing from the seventh seal we are introduced to the seven trumpet judgments, and from the seventh trumpet comes the seven bowl judgments. To get a mental picture of how this plays out, consider an old pirate's telescope.

This morning we are going to look at six out of the seven seals. We will get to the seventh seal later. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 6** and we will start with the first two verses. John says,

**“<sup>1</sup>Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.” <sup>2</sup>I looked, and 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.”**

We are told that Jesus, who now has the scroll, breaks the first seal and one of the four creatures around the throne says “**Come**” and this command is not addressed to John – it’s addressed to the horseman.

Then John sees a **white horse**. Now, if our biblical interpretation came from old cowboy movies, it would suggest this is a going to be one of the good guys, for we all know that good guys ride on white horses, in fact, Jesus rides a white horse at His second coming, but this isn’t Jesus – he just wants to look like Him.

We are told this rider on the white horse had a **bow**, and a victor’s **crown** was given to him, for he the authority to repeatedly conquer. He had a bow, but if you noticed, there’s no mention of arrows which suggests that he didn’t go to war, he carried his bow, but didn’t have to use it to be victorious. It’s a peaceful conquering. This individual starts his career as a peacemaker, and this is what we are told by the prophet **Daniel**. Let’s go back to **Daniel 9** and continue where we left off. Let’s look at **verse 27** to see what the angel Gabriel told Daniel.

**“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”**

Gabriel is speaking about the Tribulation period, and at the beginning of it, this individual will bring about a peace treaty between Israel and her Arab neighbors that is promised for **one week** or seven years, and in this peace treaty, Israel will be allowed to rebuild their temple and be permitted to perform their Old Testament sacrifices and offerings. This accounts for those last seven remaining years, and oddly enough, this is how the Tribulation period starts. It starts with peace.

So, this first rider on the white horse looks like a good guy, he’s a peacemaker – that’s how he conquers without bloodshed – **but who is he?** The rider on the white horse is symbolic of the Antichrist, and just so you know, the word “*anti*” means a couple of things. First, it means “*against*.” The Antichrist is against Christ. We understand that, we expect that, but another meaning for “*anti*” is “*in place of*.” The Antichrist opposes Christ and he also seeks to replace Christ and to be exalted as Christ.

He’s a counterfeit Christ. He’s a false Christ who brings peace, but it’s a false peace, and it’s a short-lived peace.

The Apostle Paul also described the Tribulation period starting in the same way, with peace. He said in **1 Thessalonians 5:3**,

**While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.**

So, before things get bad, things will appear good. There’s going to be peace, but it doesn’t last long because the second seal is broken. Look at **verses 3-4**.

**<sup>3</sup> When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.” <sup>4</sup> And another, a red horse, went out; and 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.**

Jesus breaks the **second seal**, and John sees another horse come out – it’s a **red** one, and power is given to him who sits on it to **take peace from the earth** so that people should kill one another. This second horseman is symbolic of war – war that will involve the earth, apparently some type of global war, but to what extent remains to be seen. I suspect that since the Antichrist will be instrumental in bringing false peace to the Middle East as a way to thrust himself onto the world stage, he will also be involved in this bloodshed – this time using global war as a clever and deceptive means to strengthen and expand his own power and influence as a key leader in the world.

This leads us to the third seal – **verses 5-6**.

**<sup>5</sup> When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup> And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.”**

Jesus breaks the **third seal** and John sees a **black horse** and the one who sat on it had a **pair of scales in his hand** for the purposes of measuring or rationing. This horseman represents famine and starvation, which would be a natural outcome of global war. We are told a **quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius**. A denarius is an average day’s wage, so during this time, people will barely be able to provide the barest of necessities for themselves –

much less their families, food will be very scarce, likely be rationed, and yet the command is given not to **damage the oil and the wine**. This command is difficult to understand, but it could mean that even in times of famine and starvation, the extras, the luxuries will be available, at least to those who can afford them. It describes a time where the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. Greed will likely play a role as it does now, and the Antichrist will probably use this condition as a tool to gain control over the economy.

So, after global war and famine, the fourth seal is broken. Let's look at **verses 7-8**.

**<sup>7</sup> When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." <sup>8</sup> I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and 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.**

Jesus breaks the **fourth seal** and John sees a pale "sickly" greenish-yellow horse that has a rider whose name is "**Death**" and his sidekick is named "**Hades**." It's the grim reaper and the grave digger who are scooping up the dead from war and famine, pestilence and wild beasts, most likely rats who spread disease – and we are told a **fourth** of the earth, easily over a billion people have died. Death claims the bodies of the lost while Hades claims their souls.

So, these are the four horsemen, often called the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", and they appear to represent the events during the first half of the Tribulation period. I believe they represent what Jesus described as the "*beginning of birth pains*" in **Matthew 24**.

Now we come to the fifth seal and maybe we might expect another horseman, but that's not the case. Here the focus shifts back up to the throne room in heaven. Look at **verses 9-11**.

**<sup>9</sup> When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw 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; <sup>10</sup> and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup> And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.**

Although we do not see activity on the earth when the **fifth seal** is broken, what we do see are the results. What we see is the result of persecution against those who become believers during the Tribulation period. People will be turning to God, and they will be persecuted and martyred for identifying with Jesus Christ.

If you noticed, these martyrs are not asking *if* vengeance is coming for their deaths – they know it’s coming; they just want to know *when* it’s coming – but they are told to wait and **rest** until the **number** of the martyrs has been **completed**. In other words, there are more to be slaughtered during the Tribulation period.

So, this fifth seal represents a widespread killing spree by the Antichrist against those who turn to Christ, especially after the Antichrist breaks the peace treaty in the middle of the Tribulation period and sets himself up to be worshiped as God.

Then comes the sixth seal and it’s a doozy. Let’s start with **verse 12**.

**<sup>12</sup> I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; <sup>13</sup> and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. <sup>14</sup> The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; <sup>16</sup> and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; <sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”**

Okay, this **sixth seal** represents events occurring in the last half of the Tribulation period where John describes a world that appears to be unraveling at the seams. A **great earthquake** shakes the entire globe and volcanic eruptions spew ash and smoke into the atmosphere, blacking out the sun. We are told the **whole moon became like blood** – or like we experienced with all the forest fires a few years ago, maybe the moon appears to look *like* blood because of all smoke down here. John said the **stars fell to the earth**. The word for stars is “*asters*” and it could mean any type of body in the sky like asteroids or meteorites. This could be a meteor shower or something much bigger like a comet falling from the sky.

Understandably, people will run for cover – to places that would seem stable, like **caves** and **mountains**, but they discover that their hiding places have **moved** and

collapsed. When they head for the **islands** to escape the mass hysteria and chaos, they learn the islands have submerged as well. There's no place to run or hide.

So, whatever this sixth seal is describing to us, we know it's earth-shattering, it's catastrophic, and it's intensely fearful for those on the earth. All people, both great and small, everybody, lives in terror as it appears they now recognize this is God's **wrath** turned against them, and the question is asked, **who is able to stand?**

As I have said before, I do not believe the church will go through the Tribulation period, and thank God for that, so **what are we to do with this?** **What are we to take from this passage?**

Well, it reveals a lot about God. True to His nature, we see that God is loving, for like any good parent, He gives a very clear warning before He renders His judgment. There are no surprises coming. In His love, God is laying it all out for us in advance, He's telling us what will happen, what must happen, and He is giving people an opportunity to come to Him by faith. He's a loving God.

Secondly, we see God's mercy. God could just snap His finger, just say the word, and in a flash, those who are saved are in heaven and those who are lost are in hell. Done. Over. He could absolutely do that, but in His mercy, God gives numerous opportunities for repentance to the lost, both in the here and now, and even during the Tribulation period. In His mercy, God patiently waits for people to come to Him by faith.

Lastly, we see that God is still in control. The judgments that take place on the earth during the Tribulation period originate in heaven. It is Jesus who is removing the seals one at a time, setting everything into motion according to His good plan and purpose. God is in control.

So, the question was asked, **who is able to stand?** And the answer is – only those who accept Jesus as their Savior and follow Him as Lord.

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