

An Introduction to Revelation 6-19

QUESTION #1 – Why do we refer to **Revelation 6-19** as “The Great Tribulation?”

The simplest answer to this question is because that is precisely what John calls this in Revelation 7:14 (της θλιψεως της μεγαλης).

John did not just invent this term himself. When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He predicted there would be a terrible time on earth when God would pour out His wrath and He referred to that time as the “Great Tribulation” (Matthew 24:21-22, 29; Mark 13:24).

In **Revelation 6:16-17**, what is happening on earth is called “the wrath of the Lamb” and the “great day of their wrath” and then in **Revelation 7:14**, it is called “the Great Tribulation.” This will be the time when the world is experiencing “mega tribulation, mega affliction and mega distress, mega wrath” coming directly from the throne of God.

QUESTION #2 – What is the main interpretive problem of **Revelation 6-19**?

The main interpretive problem of these chapters is one of chronology. The problem is simply this - “What is the exact order of the events taking place as they relate to each other and does it really matter?”

To state the problem with better precision: **In Revelation 6-19, there are three series of wrath judgments - seven seals (begin in chapter 6); seven trumpets (begin in 8:2); seven bowls (begin in 16:2). Do these events take place all at once, at the same time? Do these events take place one right after another? Do some of the events occur at the same time and others at sequential time intervals?** This is the chronological problem of **Revelation 6-19**.

There are seven observations we may make to help us resolve this:

Observation #1 - It is clear that all of the judgments are contained in the seven sealed book.
5:1, 2, 5, 9

In this seven sealed book are all of the judgments of God. Jesus Christ does not take this book, open the seals and then when complete, finds another book with trumpet and bowl judgments. There is only one book at the throne of God and all judgments come out of this book.

Observation #2 - It is clear then that the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments are part of the seven sealed book containing all the judgments (**Rev. 8:1, 7**).

Observation #3 - It is clear that Christ does not open all the seals at once; He opens them one at a time in sequential order. **6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12**

Jesus Christ is directing this entire operation as the executioner of God's wrath. It is just as Psalm 2:9 says, He will break and shatter this world.

Observation #4 - It is clear that some form of sequential-chronological time is operative during the outworking of these judgments.

For example in **Revelation 6:10**, martyrs of the Tribulation want to know how long before God settles the score and they are told to wait for awhile and then the sixth seal is broken in **6:12**.

Observation #5 - It is clear that there is an amazing similarity between Matthew 24:4-31 and **Revelation 6**, and Matthew 24:4-31 is given by Christ in chronological order.

- 1) False Christ - Matthew 24:5 / **Revelation 6:1-2 = Seal #1**
- 2) War - Matthew 24:6-7 / **Revelation 6:3-4 = Seal #2**
- 3) Famine - Matthew 24:7 / **Revelation 6:5-6 = Seal #3**
- 4) Death - Matthew 24:7-9 / **Revelation 6:7-8 = Seal #4**
- 5) Martyrdom - Matthew 24:9-10, 16-22 / **Revelation 6:9-11 = Seal #5**
- 6) Sun Darkened, Moon Darkened, Stars Falling - Matt. 24:29 / **Rev. 6:12-14 = Seal #6**
- 7) Divine Judgment - Matthew 24:32-25:6 / **Revelation 6:15-17 = Seal #7**

Dr. John Walvoord said, "The general features of Matthew 24 are obviously quite parallel to the events of the book of Revelation in **chapter 6**" (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 123).

Observation #6 - It is clear that the first six seals have their contents clearly stated, however at the breaking of the seventh seal, the contents are not immediately stated **Revelation 8:1**. This demands some chronological order in time.

Observation #7 - It is clear that the seals are numbered and there would be no purpose of the numbering of them unless they are chronological and sequential.

Based on these observations we may draw four conclusions:

(**Conclusion #1**) - The judgments, listed in these chapters, occur one right after another.
Seal 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

(**Conclusion #2**) - The total amount of judgments are all contained in the seven sealed book.
Revelation 6-19 reveals the total wrath of God which will fill up the world.

(**Conclusion #3**) - The seventh seal judgment contains both the seven trumpet and the seven bowl judgments, which makes **seal # seven the most ferocious of all**.

(**Conclusion #4**) - The Great Tribulation starts bad (**6:12-17**) and gets even worse (**16:17-21**) with the seventh seal judgment being the worst of all the wrath judgments.

QUESTION #3 – What is the specific chronological order of the time of the events?

There have been three views of the events in **Revelation 6-19**.

View #1 - Some suggest that these judgments have already occurred (Amillennialists).

This is clearly a wrong view for three main reasons:

- 1) These judgments are directly related to the Jewish kingdom and it is obvious that the Jews do not have their kingdom yet (Matthew 24; Daniel 7, 9; **Revelation 7, 11**).
- 2) These judgments occur after the Church Age and the Church is still here (1:19-4:1).
- 3) There has never been anything in history that even remotely resembles what is described in these chapters (**i.e. Revelation 16:20-21**).

View #2 - Some suggest that these judgments occur during the last half of the Tribulation.

The major problem with this view is the distinction made by Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:8. Jesus Christ specifically identifies at least the first four seals as being the “beginning of sorrows” or “beginning of birth pangs.” Matthew 24:9 seems to indicate another major section of the Tribulation in which things get worse. Most believe, on the basis of **Revelation 6:9**, which is martyrdom and **6:11** which implies there is still a great while to go, that Matthew 24:9 is part of the first 3½ years. What this would mean is that these judgments occur all throughout the Tribulation, not just in the last half.

View #3 - Many believe that these judgments occur throughout the entire 7 year period of time, with the worst and most intense judgments beginning at the 3½ year point.

This is the easiest to defend for four reasons:

- 1) It accurately explains the period known as “the beginning of sorrows” - birth pains, labor pains begin slow and get more and more intense.
- 2) It leaves the worst judgments for the last 3½ years.
- 3) It gives a logical order and reason for the gap between the sixth and seventh seal (**6:12 / 8:1**).
- 4) It gives a logical explanation for **Revelation 6:11**, which says the program of God has a while to go and that martyrdom has not yet reached its severest level.

We conclude the following:

- 1) All of God’s wrath judgments are contained in the seven sealed book.
- 2) The events of Revelation 4-5 occur probably shortly after the Rapture.
- 3) The seals will be released in chronological order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.
- 4) The seventh seal contains the seven trumpet and seven bowl judgments. The seventh trumpet wrath judgment contains the seven bowl judgments.
- 5) The terrible wrath of God will occur during the entire seven year period with the worst time being the last 3½ years.
- 6) The middle of the seven year period is somewhere near the seventh seal judgment. The first 3½ years are given in **Revelation 6** and the last 3½ years are given in **Revelation 7-19**.

Revelation 6:1-17

Revelation 6-19 is a graphic description of “the Great Tribulation,” a time in which God will pour out His ferocious wrath on this world. **Revelation 6** is the chapter in the Bible that starts it all. After the universal worship and tribute to the Lamb, the Lamb begins the Great Tribulation. When you read **Revelation 6** and realize this is just the beginning, one quickly discerns these judgments go from bad to worse, from horrible to unbearable, and from terrible to ferocious.

In **Revelation 6:1**, it is very important to see that it is “the Lamb” who is responsible for these judgments. It is “the Lamb” who breaks these seals and authorizes everything. Everything in this Great Tribulation, including the introduction and activity of the Antichrist, is fully authorized and controlled by Jesus Christ.

This is an extremely important point to realize. God is sovereign and His purposes stand. In Paul’s description of the Antichrist in II Thessalonians 2:3-12, he is very clear to point out that it is God who is in charge and not Satan (II Thessalonians 2:6-8, 11*). That point is certainly evident when we come to:

SEAL JUDGMENT #1 – The Tribulation surfacing of the Antichrist. **6:1-2**

According to **verse 1**, John actually saw the Lamb break the first seal, and he heard one of the four living creatures say with a loud thunderous voice, “Come.” Dr. Harry Ironside said that thunder always speaks of a coming storm, so when the living creature thunders his voice, we may assume that God’s ferocious storm of judgment is about to hit the world (*Revelation*, p. 102).

The command to “come” is not a command given to John; it is given to the man described in verse 2. Everything in this Tribulation is totally subject to God. Jesus Christ breaks the seal and then one of the four living beings connected to God’s judgment commands this false Christ to surface.

This first judgment will be a massive deluding of the world pulling it away from truth. Keep in mind this is a judgment authorized by God from His throne. One might ask, why would God ever permit false religions to exist? One answer is found in Deuteronomy 13:1-4. God sometimes tests His people to see if they love Him and His Word. **There are five facts we may see about this first seal judgment:**

Fact #1 - The first seal judgment features a white horse. **6:2a**

There is no question that when we study Biblical prophecy, horses are used to carry out the will of God in regard to judgment (Zechariah 1:8-10; 6:1-7). The “white horse” is very significant because according to Jewish thinking, the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a “white horse.” This is one reason why when Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, it did not impress most Jews. The initial look that this one will have will be good, especially to Israel.

Daniel predicts that the Antichrist will appear to be Israel's Messiah and friend so when this man surfaces, many will think he is the Messiah (Daniel 9:27).

Fact #2 - The first seal judgment features a rider on the white horse. **6:2b**

The major interpretive question most ask is "who is the rider on the white horse" who surfaces at the beginning of the Tribulation? Two interpretations have been suggested, but only one actually fits the context:

(Interpretation #1) - Some have said it refers to Jesus Christ .

Upon careful examination, we will quickly reject this view. Dr. Walvoord said upon careful study of the context we will see that there is no real parallel between the rider on this horse and Jesus Christ (*Revelation*, p. 553).

(Interpretation #2) - Some have said it refers to the Antichrist .

Most serious Bible students agree this is a reference to many false Christs, including the Antichrist who surfaces at the beginning of the Tribulation. Shortly after the Rapture many counterfeit Christs will surface, including the Antichrist, who will gain great political control of ten kingdoms and the Middle East. We may prove that this is a reference to the Antichrist by observing five simple evidences:

Evidence #1 - One of the living creatures commands this rider to come, and no place in the book of Revelation does any created being command Jesus Christ to do anything. The creature does not command the Creator.

Evidence #2 - Jesus Christ does not come until Revelation 19:11-15, and when He does come there are four major differences: **1)** Jesus Christ does not come with a bow, but with a sword (19:15); **2)** Jesus Christ does not come with one crown of victory (στεφανος) but with many crowns of royalty (διαδηματα) (19:12); **3)** Jesus Christ does not come to try to conquer; He comes to reign (19:11); **4)** Jesus Christ does not just come with one white horse, but brings armies following Him who are also on white horses (19:11, 14).

Evidence #3 - Jesus Christ does not come until the end of the Tribulation and this rider comes at the beginning of the Tribulation.

Evidence #4 - Jesus Christ taught that the first feature of the Tribulation would be a misleading by false Christs, which parallels the events of **Revelation 6** (Matthew 24:4-5, 24; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8).

Evidence #5 - The thing that starts the seven year Tribulation is the Antichrist enters into a peace treaty with Israel (Daniel 9:27).

Fact #3 - The first seal judgment features a rider who has a bow . **6:2c**

Notice very carefully that the text says he has a bow but no arrows . The implication of this is that the Antichrist is able to initially conquer without war . He will surface as a world peacemaker who is able to gain political power and victory without war. The Apostle Paul confirms that “the day of the Lord” will initially surface by promoting “peace and safety” (I Thessalonians 5:2-3).

It is more than just a coincidence to note that in the O.T., the bow often symbolizes political forces who are at war with God (Psalm 46:9; Jeremiah 51:56; Hosea 1:5). This Antichrist will be at war with God, but he will be a shrewd politician who will have his political victory.

Fact #4 - The first seal judgment has a rider who is given a crown . **6:2d**

We seem two things about this crown that are important:

- 1) It is a crown of victory, not royalty.
- 2) It is one crown, not plural crowns.

The Antichrist will come on the scene with a small political victory. We know from Daniel that he will initially surface taking charge of three nations (Daniel 7:8, 20, 24). Obviously, he comes on the scene at the beginning of the Tribulation.

Fact #5 - The first seal judgment features a rider who is allowed to conquer . **6:2e**

Once the Antichrist surfaces, he will start his real agenda to “conquer” the world. The repetition of the word “conquer” indicates that after his initial surfacing, this counterfeit will head out into a career of conquering with his goal being worldwide domination.

The Apostle Paul said that the Antichrist does not surface until after the Rapture of the Church (II Thessalonians 2:7-8), and this is confirmed in Revelation 6:1-2 by this first seal judgment.

SEAL JUDGMENT #2 – The Tribulation judgment of the worldwide outbreak of war . **6:3-4**

The second seal judgment during the Tribulation will be a major outbreak of war. Jesus predicted this very judgment when He said concerning the signs that would lead to His Second Coming: “And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom ...” (Matthew 24:6-7a; Mark 13:7-8a; Luke 21:9-10).

There are six specific judgment facts we learn about this second seal judgment:

Fact #1 - Jesus Christ is the One who breaks the second seal. **6:3a**

The war judgment begins with full authorization of Jesus Christ. He is the only One authorized by God who can pour out judgment from God's throne because He is God.

Most people do not realize that God is a "warrior" (Exodus 15:3). God uses war as a judgment. God is a God who can bring peace or take peace. God can ordain it so people love each other or slay each other. During the Tribulation, He will authorize war on a major scale.

Fact #2 - The second seal judgment begins by a living being commanding the judgment to come. **6:3b**

It is not Satan who is bringing this war into existence; this is coming right from the throne of God. God has one of His cherubim command this judgment to begin. There are structure and order and rank responsibilities at the throne of God.

Fact #3 - The second seal judgment features another horse. **6:4a**

The pronoun "another" (*αλλος*) means another of the same kind. Another judgmental horse comes into view, similar to the first one but different in judgment assignment.

Fact #4 - The second seal judgment features a red horse. **6:4b**

The question to ask is "why red?" Walter Scott does a good job of explaining this: "The white horse denote a series of peaceful victories. The red horse, on the other hand, intimates a period of slaughter and bloodshed" (*Revelation*, p. 148) (Isaiah 63:1-6). We know from Zechariah 1:7-17; 6:1-8 that God uses angelic beings to patrol the earth and one of the colors of the horses which He uses is red. **This color red is connected to bloody warfare (II Kings 3:22-23). It is clear that this red horse in Revelation is one connected to war.**

We may also notice that there is a rider on the horse who is not identified except by the pronoun "him." God will permit a specific man to surface who will promote war. Daniel predicts the Antichrist will be a man who actually worships war as his "god" (Daniel 11:38). God is the One who actually is using this man for His judgment purposes.

Fact #5 - The second seal judgment takes peace from the earth. **6:4c**

We know that when the Great Tribulation first begins, it will begin with a focus on peace. This was predicted by Daniel (Daniel 9:27) and by Paul (I Thess. 5:3; II Thess. 2:3-4). Once this seal is broken by Jesus Christ, things on earth will instantly change. Peace will be removed by God and men will "slay one another."

The pronoun "another" (*αλληλους*) means another of the same kind, which means there will be outbreaks of civil war. There will be wars from within the nation and wars from without a nation.

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Nation will rise against nation and also nationals will rise against nationals. Wars and rumors of wars will be all one hears and sees. This will be a scary time.

Don't ever forget this point - the same God who says "blessed are the peacemakers" can also say "blessed are the peace takers."

Fact #6 - The second seal judgment features a great sword. **6:4d**

War and bloodshed will be at the ultimate mega level during the Tribulation as a direct judgment of God.

Isaiah predicts the Antichrist will make the earth tremble and world kingdoms shake. He will conquer the whole world through war and even kill his own national people (Isaiah 14:16-20). Daniel says that the Antichrist will wage war with God's people and overpower them (Daniel 7:21) and will devour the whole world (Daniel 7:23). He will go to war against the strongest military powers (Daniel 11:39).

This world will be one massive war zone by direct judgment of God. **This world will be a scary place to be during the Tribulation and this is only seal judgment #2.**

SEAL JUDGMENT #3 – The Tribulation judgment of a worldwide famine. **6:5-6**

It was clearly predicted by Jesus Christ that one of the judgments that would be a prelude to His Second Coming would be famine (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11). This particular eschatological famine will apparently be in close proximity to various earthquakes.

Now famine is a natural result of war. When war occurs, three things happen in the world of agriculture: **1)** Farmers stop planting and harvesting crops; **2)** The food and crops that are available are taken as spoils by the war winner; **3)** Much of the land used to produce crops has been destroyed by the war. If we remember that seal judgment #2 is a worldwide outbreak of war, a big problem in the aftermath will be food shortages.

There are six facts we want to observe about Tribulation seal judgment #3:

Fact #1 - The third seal judgment starts when Jesus Christ breaks open the third seal. **6:5a**

Jesus Christ is in total and complete charge in authorizing these judgments. All judgment has been turned over to Jesus Christ by God the Father (John 5:22, 26-27).

Fact #2 - The third seal judgment begins when a living creature commands it. **6:5b**

High ranking angels are intimately involved in pouring out God's wrath on this earth. God is in sovereign control, accomplishing His purposes, even when children are starving to death as a direct judgment from Him (i.e. Ezekiel 5:16-17).

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Fact #3 - The third seal judgment features a black horse. **6:5c**

There is no question that we can connect this color of a horse to starvation because of hunger (Lamentations 4:8-9).

Fact #4 - The third seal judgment features a rider with a pair of scales . **6:5d**

Food prices are going to change and get way out of control. The idea of having scales is the idea of being able to measure the amount of something. In this context in Revelation, the imagery is that of measuring the famine, specifically as to how much food one can buy.

This is a very important point to see. The actual amount of food that one gets for a certain amount of money is determined by God. When God wants the scales tilted so that food becomes an almost impossible expenditure, He can tilt the scales just that way. Economies are controlled by God. Wise are those nations who seek to be right with the God who controls the economy.

Fact #5 - The third seal judgment features terrible inflation . **6:6a**

Notice this inflation is being authorized from the throne of God. God is determining the amount of inflation. The text specifically says that during this time “a quart of wheat” may be purchased for a denarius, and “three quarts of barley” may be purchased for a denarius.

Now a denarius was a Roman coin worth approximate one day’s wage (Matthew 20:2). So the idea here would be you would need a days wage to purchase one quart of wheat or three quarts of barley. Barley was mixed with wheat because it was cheaper and also it was less nutritious. By mixing barley with wheat you could make the wheat last longer for bread or for cereal.

The average person would eat about a quart of wheat for one day. Herodotus, the Greek historian, says a quart of wheat was typically a one day supply of food for one of Xerxes’ soldiers (Stephen Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 153).

So what we learn here is that it will take almost a day’s wage to earn enough food for one person for one day. Of course, the Antichrist will use this to get control of the world in feeding the masses of people (Revelation 13:17), which we will see later. Those living in the first century would have interpreted this as being twelve to fifteen times higher than what they typically paid for food. Dr. Alan Johnson said that it will cost a person twelve times what it normally would for food during the Tribulation.

If a gallon of milk costs \$3, it will cost \$36. A loaf of bread that costs \$2 will cost \$24. This will be the time when God’s people will truly have to pray “give us this day our daily bread.”

Fact #6 - The third seal judgment features restrictions on two items. **6:6b**

Two things that God will permit to exist through the Tribulation are olive oil and wine. The command not to hurt the oil and wine is addressed to the third horseman. So these items will be available during the Tribulation.

Both oil and wine were staple products and not luxury items. Both of these commodities come from God's nature: oil from the olive tree and wine from the grapevine. Wine was a drink and olive oil was used for many things: 1) Trading (I Kings 5:11); 2) Food (I Kings 17:12); 3) Light/fuel (Exodus 25:6); 4) Medicine (Isaiah 1:6); 5) Anointing (I Samuel 16:13).

This third seal judgment will be the most severe famine ever to hit the world. With food being so scarce and inflation being so high, the only ones who will be able to afford this will be the rich, who are alluded to later in the chapter (**6:15**).

SEAL JUDGMENT #4 – The Tribulation judgment of death. **6:7-8**

This seal judgment will absolutely prove that the Tribulation has never occurred because what is described here is something you will not be able to find in any history book. This judgment will kill one quarter of the world's population.

There are five facts we may see about this fourth seal judgment:

Fact #1 - The fourth seal judgment begins when Jesus Christ breaks the fourth seal. **6:7a**

Jesus Christ is the One authorizing this judgment. Death is just as much authorized by God as life (i.e. Jeremiah 15:2).

Fact #2 - The fourth seal judgment begins when the living creature commands it to begin. **6:7b**

This high ranking cherubim is doing exactly what Jesus Christ wants it to do, and what He wants is to pour out another judgment. As with everything God does, there is systematic order even to this judgment: war - famine - death.

Fact #3 - The fourth seal judgment features a pale horse. **6:8a**

The actual word "pale" or "ashen" is a Greek word that describes a color that is a sickly, pale green. In fact, a form of this word is used in Revelation 8:7 where it is translated green. Dr. Alan Ross said "pale" (chloros) denotes a yellowish green, the light green of a plant or the paleness of a sick person in contrast to a healthy appearance" (*Revelation*, p. 474). This certainly is a fitting color for this judgment. Dr. Charles Ryrie called this "a sickly, yellowish-green."