

Jesus and the War for Our Worship

October 11, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Revelation 6:1-17

Session Outline

1. The Four Horsemen (Revelation 6:1-8)
2. The Fifth Seal (Revelation 6:9-11)
3. The Sixth Seal (Revelation 6:12-17)

Theological Theme

God is sovereign.

Call to Action

Recall that Christ remains with His people, even in the midst of hardship and suffering.

Leader Guide

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Introduction

In our reading in Revelation last week, John was in the heavenly throne room and saw a scroll (Revelation 5:1). The scroll had writing on both sides (signifying that it was full, complete, and final). It featured seven seals (the biblical number of perfection, fullness, and completion). Scholars generally interpret the scroll to represent God's plan for creation, and Jesus Christ is the only one worthy to open the seals on the scroll. This week, we'll see what happens when the Lamb (Jesus) opened the seals on the scroll.

-  What takeaways have you had from our study of Revelation so far?
-  When you hear "the four horsemen" (we will read about them today), what comes to mind? What are some cultural ideas around this group?

Session Summary

In our passage today, Jesus began to open the seals on the scroll John saw in the heavenly throne room. The first four seals ushered in the four horsemen, representing hardship and suffering in the human experience, the fifth, religious persecution, and the sixth, the end of the world as we know it. Despite all the suffering that characterizes human life, we're reminded that we have hope. God is sovereign. And Christ has already won.

1. The Four Horsemen (Revelation 6:1-8)

-  How would you describe the four horsemen in these verses in your own words?
-  What type of events does each rider bring about?

The four horsemen have taken on a persona of their own in pop culture. In Scripture, they appear as agents of judgement. Zechariah also saw a vision of horsemen, though the colors of the horses differ (Zechariah 1:7-11). Interpretations about the four horsemen vary and we will discuss one possibly interpretation.

The four horsemen may represent the main agents of suffering and pain that exist in our fallen world.¹ Jesus warned His followers of these categories of suffering at the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24.

The First Seal: The White Rider²

The first horseman rode a white horse, held a bow, was given a crown, and went out to conquer. This image is similar to the image of the conquering Jesus in Revelation 19, but is only imitating Jesus. And this white rider does, indeed, conquer, but maybe not like we're picturing. He conquers through deception and lies.

Some interpreters understand this rider to be the antichrist, but, more generally, he represents the false gospels our world peddles. These often include the idea that we can save ourselves (you only have to look inside and find the “real” you . . . “You do you!” . . . “You control your own destiny.”). The white rider has even conquered in the church, thanks to false teaching. The New Testament warns us against this!

Jesus replied to them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many.”
—Matthew 24:4-5

There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their depraved ways, and the way of truth will be maligned because of them. They will exploit you in their greed with made-up stories. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep. —2 Peter 2:1-3

The Second Seal: The Red Rider

The second horseman rode a fiery red horse, and “was allowed to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another” (v. 4). This rider brought about war, but more than that, even in the absence of war, he promoted anger in the absence of peace.

We live in an angry world. By cultural standards, taking your anger out on others is acceptable (sometimes even encouraged!). We snap. We rage. And, many times, society cheers us on. And the red rider keeps on riding. But Scripture guides us in another way.³

You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because these things must take place, but the end is not yet.
—Matthew 24:6

The First Four Seals

The breaking of the first four seals brings forth four horsemen of different colors. These riders, paralleling the chaos predicted in Mark 13, represent God's judgments through the upheavals of war and its devastating social consequences: violence, famine, pestilence, and death. The fifth seal is the plea of martyred saints for divine justice upon their oppressors. For now they are told, they must wait, for the number of the martyred of God's people is not yet complete.

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. —James 1:19-20

The Third Seal: The Black Rider⁴

The third horseman rode a black horse, held a pair of scales, and rode out with a warning of famine. The conditions described here are dire, bare portions with inflated prices. A quart of barley was enough for a person to physically survive but not thrive. While food needed for survival is overpriced and meager, the luxuries are untouched. Famine is a reality in our world, but the effect of the black rider goes deeper than that.

The black rider leaves us without the things we need, but with the luxuries we want in abundance. Can you see this play out in our society? Think of someone who has more than they know what to do with but poverty in their soul. We're reminded of the letter to Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22). They thought they needed nothing, but they had a deep need for the Lord. Jesus also warned of this reality during His earthly ministry:

"For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these events are the beginning of labor pains." —Matthew 24:7-8

The Fourth Seal: The Green Rider⁵

The fourth horseman rode a "pale green horse," went by the name of "Death," and was followed by Hades (v. 8), and the pair was given authority to kill a fourth of the earth. This rider's horse isn't the color of the green pastures that the Good Shepherd leads us beside (Psalm 23:2), but the color of the sickness and death he ushered in.

Even in the privileged west, so many of us are touched by the devastation of disease and are intimately acquainted with the despair this co-rider brings: death.

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." —John 16:33



Which of these realities feels more prominent to you in the world today? Why?

2. The Fifth Seal (Revelation 6:9-11)



What group of people does this passage identify and what is their significance?



What are the implications of this picture for God's people?

The four horsemen were riding but the list of things humans must endure is not over. In the description of the opening of the fifth seal, we hear from the martyrs. Jesus warned of religious persecution:

“But you, be on your guard! They will hand you over to local courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them. And it is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations.” —Mark 13:9-10

John described this group as “those who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given” (v. 9). This is a very similar to the description given as the reason John was imprisoned on Patmos (because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus [Revelation 1:9]). These believers had been persecuted and killed for their faith.

They knew God is just and will right the wrongs done to them. A white robe was clothing for a conqueror. By their faithfulness in Christ, these martyrs received a heavenly reward.⁶ They were told to “rest a little while longer” (v. 11). More would be added to their numbers. More martyrs are being added to their number today, even in 2026.

According to an Open Doors International 2025 report:⁷

- 4,849 Christians were killed for their faith
- 388 million Christians around the world suffer significant levels of discrimination and persecution for their faith
- 224,129 Christians were forced to leave their homes, and leave the country or go into hiding
- 3,632 incidents of attacks on churches and Christian properties were recorded

Religious persecution for believers is still alive and well in our world today, and many of our brothers and sisters are being added to the heavenly number we read about in Revelation 6.



What stands out to you about these numbers? How are they sobering? How do they motivate us toward prayer?

3. The Sixth Seal (Revelation 6:12-17)



What kind of events does this passage describe? What might these represent broadly?



What question is asked in this passage? Who asks it and what is the answer?

The sixth seal brings natural calamity. An earthquake. The sun turned black. The moon became like blood. The stars fell. The fig tree dropped its (unripe) fruit because it was shaken by high winds. The sky split apart. Every mountain and island was moved.

The scene this depicts is extreme and dire. This is the end of the world as we know it. It is reminiscent of the scene in Joel 2:28-32.

John named the top to bottom of the social order in this group. Kings and rulers and governments cannot save themselves, much less the rest of us. The wealthy and those with great influence are in the same boat as the poor and destitute. All are hiding in the caves and mountains, hoping the rocks will fall on them so they are spared from judgment. They ask: “And who is able to stand?” (v.17)

This question is answered in chapter 7: believers. All in Christ, “a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language” (7:9), will stand, protected by God’s seal.



How can you be certain that you are among those who are able to stand as one found in Christ?

Conclusion

The four horsemen aren’t saved for later judgement. The destruction they spread is here. We’re already experiencing it. All in this group have been touched by one of the realities they embody. Religious persecution is alive and well, too. And one day, the world as we know it will end. But there is hope.

As we read these passages that can bring fear, it is important to remember God is sovereign over all things, including history and events we can’t explain or wrap our minds around. Christ has already won. Even as we suffer through the worst parts of the human experience, we are not alone (Matthew 28:20).

- ❓ What does today's passage teach us about God and His character?
- ❓ How can we encourage one another in faithfulness and godly living when facing suffering, especially suffering for the Lord?
- ❓ How does this passage motivate us toward urgency in gospel conversations with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for being just, right, and sovereign. Thank Him for the gift of the book of Revelation and the truth in its pages. Ask for His help as you continue in your study, that He would teach you what you need to know, and reveal areas He wants you to grow.

Memory Verse

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!" —Revelation 6:1

Additional Resources

- *Be Victorious* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Exalting Jesus in Revelation* by Daniel Akin
- *Revelation for You* by Tim Chester



Historical Context of Revelation

Purpose

Much of the book of Revelation focuses on events at the end of the age (eschatology), more so than any other book in the Bible. But it also focuses on practical choices that believers and unbelievers must make in the course of their lives that have far-reaching consequences at the end.

Author

The traditional view holds that the author of Revelation is the apostle John, who wrote the Fourth Gospel and the three letters of John. Evidences for this view include the following. (1) The writer referred to himself as “John” (1:4, 9; 22:8). (2) He had personal relationships with the seven churches of Asia Minor (1:4, 11; 2–3). (3) His circumstances at the time of writing (1:9) matched those of John the apostle (who was placed in Asia Minor from about AD 70 to 100 by reliable historical sources from the second century AD). (4) The saturation of the book with Old Testament imagery and echoes implies a Jewish writer, like John, operating in overwhelmingly Gentile Asia Minor.

Setting

The initial audience that received the book of Revelation was a group of seven local churches in southwest Asia Minor (1:11; 2–3). Some of these congregations were experiencing persecution (2:9–10, 13), probably under the Roman emperor Domitian (ruled AD 81–96). Others had doctrinal and practical problems (2:6, 13–15, 20–23). Also behind these surface problems was the backdrop of unseen but powerful spiritual warfare (2:10, 14, 24; 3:9).

Special Features

The resurrected, glorified Jesus Christ revealed himself to the apostle John, who had been imprisoned “on the island called Patmos” (1:9). Christ’s twofold purpose was: (1) to “unveil” a spiritual diagnosis for seven of the churches in Asia Minor with which John was familiar (chaps. 2–3), and (2) to reveal to John a series of visions setting forth events and factors related to the end times (chaps. 4–22).

Extended Commentary

Revelation 6

6:1–8 The lifting of the first four seals is portrayed in this section as four horsemen, an image likely drawn from Zch 1:7–11, though the colors of the horses are different. There is debate about whether any, or all, of what is pictured here has already taken place. However, no catastrophe has devastated a fourth of the earth since the time this prophecy was given (Rv 6:8).

6:1, 3, 5, 7 It appears that the command Come! from each of the four living creatures sets in motion the dramatic effects unleashed by removing each of the seals.

6:2 Some have taken the rider here as a description of Christ because of its similarity to him at the second coming (19:11). Given the context, this rider symbolizes destructive conquest followed by war, famine, and death. The word for crown (Gk *stephanos*) differs from the many crowns (Gk *diademata*) of Jesus in Rv 19:12.

6:4 The description here strongly parallels Mt 24:6–7, with “wars and rumors of wars” and nations and kingdoms rising up against one another.

6:5–6 The apparent descriptions of famine conditions here would naturally follow the state of war portrayed in vv. 2, 4. A quart of wheat or barley was enough food for a person for one day. Thus, the greatly inflated cost of these necessities indicates a severe drought, though oil and wine are plentiful.

6:8 Hades was popularly known as the grave and resting place after Death (see 20:11–15). The text does not say that a fourth of the population of the earth was killed, but only that authority was given to “Death” and “Hades” over this proportion of the world, allowing them to kill freely.

6:9–11 The phrase under the altar and the mention of blood recall the sacrificial blood poured at the base of the altar in Ex 29:12. The souls of those who had been slaughtered may refer to believers killed during the removal of the first four seals (6:2, 4, 8) or generally to “the blood of prophets and saints, and of all those slaughtered on the earth” (18:24). Their being killed because of the word of God and their testimony for Christ is the same reason given for John’s imprisonment on the island of Patmos (1:9). Since the “hour of testing” (i.e., the tribulation period; 3:10) is focused on the “earth dwellers,” the delay here (rest a little while longer) implies the “hour of testing” has not yet begun. The Lord’s just vengeance (Rm 12:19) for the martyrs begins in earnest in Rv 16:4–7 and is not completed until 19:2. On white robe, see 3:4–5. It is not known when the number of their fellow martyrs is completed.

6:12–17 The effects when the sixth seal is lifted from the scroll (sun turned black and moon became like blood) are very similar to those in Jl 2:28–31, which are said to occur just before the day of the Lord (Jl 2:31). This is the same as the great day of the wrath of God the Father and the Lamb (vv. 16–17; Zph 1:14–15). Some think this is the time of the second coming of Christ because of the similarity in wording between certain aspects of the sixth seal and Mt 24:29–31. Because the identical Greek word and form for come is used in regard to the prophecy in Jd 14, which has a futuristic meaning, it is best to translate it here as “the great day of their wrath is (about to) come.” The question and who is able to stand? is answered in chap. 7.⁸

References

1. Matt Chandler, *The Overcomers: God's Vision for You to Thrive in an Age of Anxiety and Outrage* (Thomas Nelson, 2024).
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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. A. Boyd Luter, "Revelation," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
7. Open Doors US, "Open Doors US," <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/>.
8. Luter.