

## Revelation Chapter 6- John Karmelich

1. In Chapter 6, we begin the destruction of the earth. We have references to famine, war, starvation and death. This is not the feel-good story of the year. ☺
  - a) My title of this lesson is "Last Call". I'll explain the title later in the introduction. I also call this chapter "Understanding God's Judgment". The main point is to understand why God's judgment of the earth is necessary. The underlying point is to understand how it affects us as Christians living today. This will be my main theme through this lesson.
2. Let's start by giving an overview of Chapter 6:
  - a) The scene opens where it leaves off in Chapter 5: God's throne room.
    - i) In Chapter 4, John, the writer of Revelation described God's throne room.
    - ii) In Chapter 5, John focused on the key item in that throne room: A scroll sealed with seven seals. A key point to chapter 5 is Jesus is the only person worthy of loosening the seven seals on that scroll. The rest of the chapter is "everybody" giving praise to Jesus for what He has done.
  - b) This leads to Chapter 6: Jesus, called here "The Lamb", as in the sacrificial Lamb of God who died for our sins, starts to take the seals off.
  - c) As each seal is removed, the focus then changes from heaven to earth.
  - d) After each of the first four seals are removed, one of the four "creatures" (the angelic creatures with the faces of man, lion, eagle and ox from Chapter 4) tells John to "come".
    - i) That is telling John to change his visual focus from heaven to earth.
  - e) Then comes the first four "visions" of John, looking at the planet earth, and to put it mildly, lots of bad things are happening: War, famine and death.
  - f) When the fifth of the seven seals is removed, John sees some saved people who are asking in effect, "How long does all of this last?" They were told in effect, "Hang in there, until the complete number of "their group" (however many that is) is collected".
  - g) The sixth seal is removed and John sees "unsaved" people on earth, both great and small asking to be in effect, "protected from God". It is as if people realize God is in control of this show, but at the same time don't want to acknowledge Him as God."
  - h) The seventh seal is removed in Chapter 8. We'll discover the final seal has all sorts of "sub-parts" to it, for the lack of a better word. In other words, as the final seal is removed in future chapters, there are other judgments that occur. The big-picture idea is by the time all of the judgment-action is done on the earth then Jesus returns.
  - i) OK, any questions so far? ☺ We'll explain the meaning of these visions as we go. The point to understand here is that "an earth judgment" process has begun.
  - j) Notice that the removing of the seals and the judgment of the world are simultaneous events. If you think about, you cannot read what is inside a scroll until all seven seals are removed. The story is jumping back and forth between Jesus removing the seals of the scroll and what is happening on the earth as the scrolls are being removed.
    - i) If you recall from the last chapter, we don't know what is written on this scroll. There is a logical speculation that it somehow related to our salvation.
    - ii) Here is the important part: As each seal is removed, some sort of "judgment" on the earth occurs. Jesus does not return until all of this judgment is completed. The important idea is the world is being "prepared" for Jesus return.
3. One of the great debates we'll get into in Revelation is the "time length" of these visions. Let me describe what the two most predominant views are:
  - a) Predominant View #1: This judgment period covers a future seven-year time span. Within that time span, there will be "world-peace" for the first three and one half years and all the destructive judgment comes in the last three and one half years. We'll touch upon this view later in this lesson and in much more details in later lessons.

- b) Predominant View #2: This judgment covers human history from the time of Jesus until now, and continues until the second coming of Jesus. The idea is all the wars and famines through history are God's continual judgment on history for those who reject Jesus. This view holds Chapter 6 mainly tying to events that happened during the Roman Empire.
  - c) Each theory has its pro's and cons'. I personally prefer the literal 7-year theory.
  - d) For now, just understand there is a debate on this issue, and among the greater Christian world, including Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox, these are the two prevailing views.
4. Onto my favorite question: Why is all of this judgment necessary and how does it affect my life?
- a) If you think about it, God could just "zap" all the bad people off of the earth, and then send them off to hell. Why go through all of this destruction process?
  - b) This is a good time to explain the title of this lesson: "Last Call". There is a tradition before a bar or tavern closes for the night for the bartender to yell out "last call". The idea is the bartender wants to lock up and close for the night. The bartender is saying, "This is your last chance to order a drink, as this place is going to close in a few minutes".
    - i) (You've got to admit, there's something ironic about using a bunch of drunks at a bar as a key illustration in a bible study. ☺)
    - ii) The reason the destruction of the earth is done this way, is God is giving a "last call". Remember that God wants all of us to make the free-will decision (from our perspective) to choose Him.
    - iii) Let's face it, if the world were falling apart with terrible things, it should get people to turn to God and beg for mercy and forgiveness. If people see death all around them, it should get people to face their own mortality and seek peace with God during the last days.
    - iv) In that sense, having a slow, tortuous way to cause havoc on the earth prior to Jesus Second Coming, is God the Father's way of saying, "Last call"!
  - c) Here is another illustration: If you've ever taken a class on marketing techniques, they will stress the importance of setting a time limit in advertising. You always want the customer to purchase the product "now" as opposed to later. That is why products only go on sale for a limited time. The idea is to encourage us to buy the product during this time frame. To put it another way, this horrible period of time is God's "fire sale". ☺ God is saying act now, because the end is truly near.
  - d) OK, what about all the bad people who have lived and died over the past few thousand years? Why just punish the "last" generation of people as opposed to all who refused to Jesus over history? What about "bad people" who died prior to Jesus?
    - i) This is why some hold the view that all the wars and famines over the past two thousand years is God's "continual" judgment on those who refuse to repent. The argument goes that all the negative stuff beginning here in Chapter 6 cover the time since the Gospel message was first preached. Yes, Christians suffer during this time era as well, but they are then saved for eternity.
    - ii) The other view, (the one I hold) is that judgment is an "individual thing" that happens after each of us die. There are saved and unsaved people that have existed throughout history. God judges each of us one day. The unsaved are sent to hell for their rejection of God. Even the saved are judged and get eternal rewards based on what we did with our knowledge of God.
    - iii) The futuristic "punishment is an end-time thing" view is that the judgment on the earth is not so about individual salvation, although people do get saved during this time frame. This final judgment is all about "preparing the world" for Jesus Second Coming. Once that happens (near the end of Revelation) there are no more free-will decisions for Christ. As I've stated, there are only "x" number of people in heaven, and as we finish up Revelation, we will achieve that "x" person being saved. The judgment is about God's "last call" to earth.

- iv) I believe God wants everyone to recognize this event when it occurs. That is another reason why I hold the literal, futuristic seven-year view. As horrible as past history has been, this is a future period that will be obvious when it occurs.
5. So what's the application of God's judgments to you and I? A couple of thoughts:
- a) Remember that God knows all things, including all things in the future. A loving God is saying in effect, "I know the horrible things that are going to happen in the future. I am writing this to warn you the reader so you can recognize them when they happen."
  - b) So why does a "loving" God allow all of this? It is like asking why God allows evil. In order for God to allow freewill, He has to "allow" people to sin and to cause evil. Suppose every time someone was about to hurt someone else, an angel stepped in and intervened. People would be complaining that God would not be allowing free will. It would then be so obvious God exists, that people would not come to Him out of their free will. I'm not here to explain all evil, and much of it is beyond comprehension. The only way God can be fair is to have life go on beyond this lifetime, so that God can set up some sort of individual trial and judgment system in the next lifetime.
  - c) The application to the believer is that this is a motivational tool to get others to turn to Jesus. Suppose there was a disease coming in the future that would kill all of mankind. Let's say the antidote was free, and anyone could take it. If we truly love people, we first need to convince them this disease is out there and then tell as many people as possible to take this free antidote before it would kill them. That "disease" is sin and the antidote is Jesus Christ. However, in order for our word to be true, the disease would really have to come to the world one day. There really has to be a "killer disease", and that is in effect what are these Revelation judgments.
  - d) Finally, the Revelation judgment is a sense of "closure". When we get hurt and those who hurt us go unpunished, there is no sense of closure of that pain. We have to trust in the fact God will judge those who do us harm. At the same time, the "sin disease" is past on to future generations. There has to be "closure" on the world and end it once and for all.
  - e) OK, let the misery begin: ☺
6. Chapter 6, Verse 1: I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" <sup>2</sup> I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.
- a) Imagine being in a room with two television sets. You were looking at one of them, and someone said, "Look at the second television". Later, something catches your attention on the first monitor and you're back to that one. You keep going back and forth.
    - i) In a sense, that is what is happening here. John the writer of Revelation was in heaven, watching Jesus loose the seals on the scroll. Then a "creature" told John to go look elsewhere. John kept looking back and forth between two scenes.
    - ii) This is the pattern of Chapter 6. Remember John is in heaven at God's throne room. John jumps back and forth between looking at Jesus loosening the scroll seals, and then looking at some vision of things that will happen on planet earth.
    - iii) It would be as if John was watching Jesus loosening the scrolls, and then someone keeps telling John to "now go look at the other monitor" and see this vision of what is happening on earth.
  - b) Before we get into the specific's of the "earthly visions", let's think about a few things:
    - i) Understand that Revelation speaks in "word-pictures". Most of Revelation is symbolic, but the symbols have specific meanings. There are some literal things in Revelation as well. When John described God's throne room back in Chapter 4, it is literally God's throne room. The items in that room have meanings, but it is literally that room.

- ii) In Verse 2 of Revelation 6, we have someone sitting on a white horse conquering the world. Can one person literally conquer the world sitting on a white horse? Not without a really powerful gun. ☺ Therefore, this is some sort of word picture. What I'm trying to teach here is to understand "when" to apply the concept that Revelation speaks in word pictures as opposed to a literal interpretation.
- c) One also has to understand that Revelation 6 is giving an "overview" of what is happening in Chapters 6 through 19. It is not like "all the things that happen in Chapter 6 start and finish, and then we move on to Chapter 7". Chapter 6 speaks of visions of conquering, war, famine and death. This is the "scene" that occurs during this judgment period prior to the specific point of Jesus Second Coming to the earth.
  - i) In other words, things get bad before things get better.
  - ii) Simply understand that Chapter 6 describes things that take place for the next bunch of chapters of Revelation. It is not a "Chapter 6 only" time reference.
- d) OK, unto the vision itself: In this first vision, there is an unnamed person on a white horse. The text says this person has a bow, a crown and he is "conquering".
  - i) A minority view argues that this is Jesus himself. This horse rider in Verse 1 is riding a white horse. When Jesus finally appears on the scene in Revelation 19:11, He enters the world riding a white horse. Therefore, some assume it is Jesus.
  - ii) The majority view, which I hold, is that this Chapter 6 horse rider is an "imitator".
    - a) In Chapter 19, Jesus is wearing multiple "crowns". The word used for crowns in Chapter 19 means "ruling" crowns. It is the idea that one has the authority to wear those crowns.
    - b) This word for crown used here in Chapter 6 is not a ruling crown, but a victory crown. It would be like getting gold medal in the Olympics. It doesn't mean you're king by divine decree, but by some victory.
    - c) In Chapter 6, we have a number of separate visions of the earth being "harmed" by four horse riders. The reason people seeing this "white horse rider" as not Jesus is that each horse rider is causing great calamity to the world. Jesus comes at the end of the "judgment" to rule over the place. It wouldn't "fit the context" if He came as one of four horse riders as well.
- e) Here's a key point to the first two verses of Chapter 6: There is a bow, but no arrows are mentioned. When one thinks of "bows", one thinks of "bows and arrows", yet the text specifically not mentions any sort of arrows.
  - i) This leads most to believe that this "conqueror" is not overcoming people with warfare, but with persuasive words. The idea is someone gaining world power by election, and not with military might.
  - ii) Let's put these two verses in context: We know that we're leading up to Jesus Second Coming, which is many chapters away. The first thing we read about is "someone" riding on earth overcoming the people.
    - a) The first four visions of Chapter 6 are about four riders on four horses. This first horseman is conquering the people without military might.
    - b) The horse riders on the next three visions are about war, death and famine.
    - c) Putting this first one in context of the next three, this "warless conquest" must have negative overtones, because the next three also have negative overtones. My point here is this first horseman, here in Verses 1-2, must be something "negative", because the next three are also negative. That is why the majority of commentators do not see this rider as Jesus himself.
- f) So who is this guy? The majority opinion is that this is the "famous" antichrist. Those who hold the opinion that Revelation 6 through 19 describe a specific 7-year period, called "The Great Tribulation", include a world leader who the bible calls, among other things, "The Antichrist". The phrase "The Great Tribulation" comes from Revelation 7:14.

- g) Before I get into the specifics of the Antichrist, know that there are other opinions as well. Some believe the "Great Tribulation" is symbolic of the last 2,000 years of history. They interpret this "white horse rider" as the Roman conquest of the world and the persecution of Christians.
- i) One can "kind of see that" only in that after the Roman Conquest, this did lead to historical periods of war, famines, and death.
  - ii) I disagree with this view in that the horse rider in Revelation 6 didn't have any arrows and the Romans "definitely" had weapons. Still, understand this view is out there and common in some Christian circles.
- h) OK, back to "the" Antichrist. Who is this guy?
- i) Let's define that term first. The word means one who is against Christ. It also means one who comes in the place of Christ, like a "cheap substitute". Good quality "fake" jewelry looks a lot like the real thing until one does a close inspection. Think of the antichrist as one who is trying to imitate Christ, and is able to fool the majority of the world with promises of world peace.
  - ii) John wrote in one of his other letters, "You have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come." (1st John 2:18b, NIV).
    - a) My point here is that there are more than one "antichrist" in that historically there have been many false teachers and many people claiming to be the "promised messiah" of Israel.
    - b) In the same sentence, John also says there is "the" antichrist.
    - c) You get the impression there has been many imitators of Jesus over the millennia, but there is still "one key guy" coming.
  - iii) Understand that this antichrist guy is not Satan himself. He is some human given all sorts of satanic power, but is not Satan himself.
  - iv) One also has to understand that whenever this guy shows up, he will be very charismatic. He "charms the world" into accepting him. Note that the Muslim world also has a messianic figure in its writings. I suspect this guy will charm most of the world into accepting him as their leader.
  - v) I always liked the term "The Coming World Leader" much better to describe this guy than the Antichrist. This guy is going to charm many, but not all of the world into accepting him as their leader.
  - vi) So when does this guy come on the scene? Paul says in 2nd Thessalonians 2:3 says that this specific "Great Tribulation" does not officially start until this guy appears. Those who believe the rapture happens prior to the tribulation argue that Christians only see the antichrist from heaven. Those who believe the rapture happens at the end of the tribulation period argue that Christians who live during this time era will see this guy.
- i) So what does this Antichrist do? The details are coming up in the later chapters, especially Chapter 13. Remember that Chapter 6 is an "introduction" to the judgment chapters of Revelation. In other words, we're just warming up. All that is happening in these two verses is an introduction to this guy. We'll describe much more details on this guy as we get to him in later chapters.
- j) OK, John, I get the idea that this is the Antichrist. What's the point? There is a pattern in the bible that the "problem" comes prior to the solution.
- i) In one sense, Adam and Eve had to be deceived in order for God to provide a solution for the sin problem.
  - ii) In order for the world to realize the necessity of a "true" Messiah to rule the world, they need to see the problems caused by a bad one.

- iii) History has proven this to be true. There have been dozens of "conquerors" promising world peace right after that leader finishes conquering the world. That leader promises prosperity to his local people right after he finishes conquering. People want a political leader who can end war and bring world peace. History has shown that it never works on a human level.
  - iv) In some ways, the coming antichrist is a continuation of the "Tower of Babel" back in Genesis 11. That tower was man's recorded attempt to unite under a single world leader. God "broke it up" in a sense to show that there will never be a true world peace until the "real" prince of peace comes. In the meantime, the world will offer "cheap substitutes".
  - v) An "ultimate" (false) world leader is part of God's "wrap up show" to show the futility of following any leader other than Christ.
  - k) Getting back to the application of this verse, it is designed to teach Christians to watch out for any leader other than Jesus himself.
    - i) The main objective is to be on the lookout for false teachers. This "coming world leader" is the ultimate fulfillment of that role.
    - ii) The other application is to teach us to have the proper perspective toward looking at world leaders. In other words, politicians can only do so much. They can't stop sin from manifesting itself. Despite all the promises politicians make, one has to take their promises with a grain of salt. They can't promise world peace because they can't stop man's sinfulness from manifesting itself.
    - iii) This still means we should vote and try to fix things the best we can. I'm only teaching about having the proper perspective when it comes to accepting the promises of a politician.
  - l) OK, I've been rambling for too long on these two verses. Let's move on.
7. Verse 3: When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"  
<sup>4</sup> Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.
- a) Remember my illustration of John looking at two television sets. It is as if John is going back and forth looking at two different "monitors".
    - i) In Verse 2, John was watching this "coming world leader" conquering the world. Verse 2 implies that this leader was doing it without warfare.
    - ii) In Verse 3, John is back to looking at Jesus loosening the second seal.
    - iii) By the end of Verse 3, John is again looking at the earth and seeing a second vision happening on planet earth.
    - iv) In other words, John is connecting the fact that "The Lamb" (a title for Jesus) is taking off these seals on a scroll one at a time. After each seal is removed, John "takes a break" from describing the seal-removal process to give us another vision on earth. The idea is to connect the seal removals with the earthly visions.
  - b) Onto "Vision #2" on earth: In this vision, we have another unnamed person riding a red horse. The rider of the power has the power to "take peace from the earth and make men slay each other". The verse also mentions this horse rider has a large sword.
    - i) Again, this is a word-picture, and not a literal guy on a horse. One guy on a horse cannot physically fight a world war all by himself. It is designed to be a word picture designed to teach the reader of Revelation things about the future.
    - ii) A key difference between "Horse Rider #1" in Verses 1-2 and "Horse Rider #2" here in Verses 3-4 is that "Horse Rider #1" did not have any offensive weapons. In the first vision, there was a bow, but no arrows. "Horse Rider #2", here in Verses 3-4 has a "big sword".
      - a) The idea is to contrast that "Horse Rider #2" is definitely about physical warfare, while "Horse Rider #1" was conquering by persuasion.

- iii) Notice the power of "Horse Rider #2": The text says he has (was given) the power to "take peace from the earth".
    - a) Does that mean we have peace (i.e., non warfare) due to God's power? Does this imply God has the power to "make" war happen? These verses imply that it is true. Does this mean every time I am angry it is because there is a demon making me angry? If that's true, I'm giving the devil too much credit and not enough to my own sinful nature! At the same time, one must understand Satan has (or will be given) the power to "start war" during this time frame.
    - iv) This second horse is red. The color red is associated with blood and that is a "pun" as this horse is associated with warfare.
  - c) Now let's put "Horse Rider #1 and "Horse Rider #2" together":
    - i) The first guy comes along and the world follows him as a leader.
    - ii) The second guy comes along, and all of sudden, everyone's in a bad mood. ☹
    - iii) Many suspect that not everyone in the world is willing to follow the antichrist and there are wars between nations and a battle for power.
    - iv) The text says, "Men slay each other". The idea is that war breaks out all over the world.
    - v) So does that mean World War I and World War II start the great tribulation?
      - a) No, for the sole reason that Jesus didn't come after the wars ended.
      - b) In this Great Tribulation scenario, the "bad guy is winning" until Jesus comes back. My point is there are times of history that resemble parts of Revelation, but for this prediction to come true, all the parts of the puzzle must fit together.
    - vi) Remember one has to see the four horse riders as overlapping events. It's not as if the Antichrist lives and dies, then comes a world war, and then comes the famine of the third horse rider.
  - d) While we're on the topic of depressing things, let's move on to Horse Rider #3. ☹
8. Verse 5: When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand.<sup>6</sup> Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"
- a) In Verse 5, John stops describing the "war horse" and sees Jesus removing the third seal on this scroll of Chapter 5.
  - b) Now we have "Horse Rider #3". The horse itself is black. We associate black with death, or at least darkness.
  - c) We don't know what this rider looks like. All we know is the rider as a pair of scales in his hand.
  - d) The concept of "balancing scales" was used for measurement. Imagine a butcher who sells meat by the pound. The meat is put on the scale to get an exact measurement. The idea of scale is "something" is being precisely measured.
  - e) The "what" is being measured is stated in Verse 6: Someone announces "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages".
  - f) The idea is that of a famine. It requires a day's wage for either exactly a quart of wheat or three quarts of barley.
    - i) Imagine working a whole day just to buy one loaf of bread. Barley is less nutritious than "regular" wheat bread and that is why one can buy more barley.
    - ii) The main idea is that there is a famine in the land. The famine is so bad that one has to work all day just to barely physically survive.

- g) The next part of the text says, "Do not damage the oil and the wine!"
    - i) The idea of "oil and wine" is that these are luxury items. At the same time of this famine, there is also a supply of luxury items for the financially wealthy.
  - h) OK, John, so what's going on here?
    - i) Somehow, this famine is not so much a lack of crops, but a case where the famine is "man-controlled". Maybe the food is needed for the soldiers and there is not enough for those living "at home". Somehow, somehow, there is not enough food to go around, and it is rationed, or the market price is so expensive, that practically everyone is starving. At the same time, there is a very rich class of people controlling things and they still get to use the "oil and wine".
    - ii) Those who know their history know that there have been times and periods like this in civilization. There are places in the world with either very rich or very poor people and no middle class. That is a scene being described in the end times.
    - iii) My personal view is that there is a powerful ruling class controlling the amount of food to the masses through high prices, and they are getting rich off of this.
  - i) OK, I feel sorry for them. What's the application? Let's get back to my opening question of "Understanding God's Judgment":
    - i) In order for God to show the world the necessity of Jesus return to earth, God is showing how man "messes things up" when left to its own.
    - ii) This is why some people interpret Revelation as being about world history since the time of Jesus. They see our history of war, power and famine and say, "Look what man does when it turns its collective back on God".
    - iii) Those who see Revelation as a single future event is man's last attempt" to get its collective act together without God and fails miserably. The idea of the Great Tribulation to show the world the necessity of having Jesus rule over our lives.
    - iv) Sin is all about doing anything and everything that is displeasing to God. It started with Adam and Eve's willful decision to disobey God. A purpose of history is for God to show mankind the futility of trying to live life without Him. The Great Tribulation is the "final act" of this man made attempt. It is (or will be) mankind's greatest attempt to do things without God and at the same time, mankind's greatest failure.
    - v) You get the impression that millions or billions of people will be starving, and at the same time, they will be aware of an elite class that exists. Hopefully, people will be crying out to God for justice. That's the idea. God's using another motivational tool to get people to reach out for Him. In other words, this is another aspect of God's "last call".
    - vi) The personal application to Christians is about the times in our lives when we either willfully or unconsciously do things "our way" as opposed to God's way. Revelation shows us what ultimately happens when we turn our back on God. It should be a reminder to us that God's way is the best way for our lives, in all aspects of the way we live.
  - j) By the way, notice the words spoken are not by "Horse Rider #3". The text says the voice is coming from "among the four living creatures". The point is the voice is coming from heaven and not from the Horse Rider. It is God himself who ordains (or allows) this famine, not the horse rider.
9. Verse 7: When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"<sup>8</sup> I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.
- a) Now comes the fourth horse rider: The text says this rider has the "power of death" to kill one fourth of the world.

- b) The idea of this verse is between the wars and famine, one in four people worldwide will be killed. Let that one sink in for a moment.
  - c) As most study bibles point out, the word "pale" is "chlor-os", from which we get chloroform. It is a pale green color. If you ever see a dead human corpse, that is the color.
  - d) Is God cruel by doing this? He "would be" if there was no afterlife. Remember it is not how long one lives, but how one lives that counts for eternity. I also wonder if those who died because of these wars and plagues are better off than those who have to live through the next set of judgments coming up in future chapters.
  - e) If you have ever been to a funeral or in a situation where people have died around you, you will notice it makes people stop and think about their own mortality. Unfortunately, most people don't spend a lot of time thinking about life after death. There is something about seeing someone you know die, that makes you think about your own relationship with God. If anything, this death plague is another motivational tool for God's "last call" plan to get people to repent and accept the Gospel message.
  - f) One thing to get from this text is not everyone dies during this judgment period. Grant it, a lot of people do, but it is not everyone. For those of us who believe in a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ right after this seven-year period, Jesus will rule over the survivors.
  - g) Notice the methodology of death is specified in Verse 8: "Sword, famine, plagues and wild beasts". If you think of it, there is a logical flow to these verses. The sword refers to wars. Famines also come from war and government controls. With a lack of food, there are also diseases that come. Animals are also starving and attack people.
    - i) One of the reasons I hold a "rapture prior to the tribulation" view is I don't want to live through this! Obviously, I also believe my view is correct, but I have to admit I'm motivated to avoid pain. ☺ Hopefully, that's God's idea as well. He wants us to read this and think, "OK, here's another motivational tool to get us to repent and turn from God in order to avoid this period of time."
  - h) You get the impression there are demonic powers behind all of this. It is as if such powers have always wanted to harm people and now God, "lets them loose".
    - i) What are the demonic powers' motivation to do all of this? Are these demons robots designed to kill? My view is that demons have free will. Part of it is they want their leader, Satan to rule. Another aspect is Satan realizes that only "x" number of people get saved, and then his time is over. The more people Satan can kill through his forces, the more people who won't commit their lives to Jesus, thus he is motivated to destroy human life. This doesn't excuse his behavior, but it helps us to understand why all of this is happening.
  - i) I should also stop here and ask the question, "Why are all four of these guys on horses? What's the necessity of mentioning horses? In the first century when John wrote this, the horse was the fastest means of transportation. I believe the idea is that when each of these things occur, the "riders" can travel quickly.
  - j) For those who have heard the cliché "The Four Horseman", it comes from these verses.
10. Verse 9: When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup> They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" <sup>11</sup> Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.
- a) Before I start Verse 9, let me put the last set of verses in perspective:
    - i) This whole chapter takes place up in heaven.
    - ii) John, the writer of Revelation was somehow caught up into heaven in Chapter 4.
    - iii) John is in God's throne room. The action in the room focuses around a scroll.
    - iv) This scroll is sealed with seven seals. We don't know what is written on the scroll.

- v) In Chapter 5, only Jesus is found worthy enough to take off the seals.
  - vi) Now we're up to Chapter 6. As Jesus takes off each seal, John is told to "look over there" and see some sort of vision. John is going back and forth between looking at Jesus removing the seals and looking at some vision after each seal is removed.
  - vii) So far, we have had four seals removed. With each seal, we get "someone" on a horse causing damage to the earth. God's judgment has begun.
- b) This leads us to Verse 9: We now have the fifth seal removed. Time for another vision.
- i) In "Vision #5", there are no more horses. In this vision, there are people who are saved in focus. You get the idea they are killed during this tribulation period.
  - ii) The first thing to notice is that they are saved people. They are Christians. The text says they were killed "Because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained". In other words, these people believed in God's word and stuck to their belief to a point of death.
  - iii) The text says all these people were "slain". In other words, the text does not say that all Christians are in this location, just a specific group that were slain.
  - iv) The text says in effect these saved people then cry out to God in effect, "How long do we have to wait here? What about the people who killed us? When are you, God, going to avenge our deaths?" The text says these people are given a white robe and told to "hang in there" until everyone is there, however many that is!
    - a) Whoever this group is, they have the ability to speak, the ability to pray and the ability to realize that wherever they are, they can remember their past lives on earth and can ask for justice! It teaches us a few things about what the next life is like!
- c) There are those who see the Revelation judgment as being "historical". It refers to past and/or present time eras where people are killed just for believing in Jesus. God gives them special comfort for their suffering.
- i) Those of us who see the judgment chapters as a single future event wonder, "Well, if the church is raptured prior to this point, do people get saved in the tribulation? The answer is yes, and these verses are the proof. The church is in heaven during this time period, but there are others who get saved during the Tribulation. Going back to my title for this lesson, "Last call", some people during this "Great Tribulation" choose to order that "saving drink" before it is too late.
  - ii) Those that argue the church goes through the tribulation point to this verse and say, "You see, Christians exist during this time frame. The text says Christians are "collected" at this point until "their fellow servants" come there. In other words, Jesus is telling the people who were killed to "Hold on until everyone is here".
    - a) The counterargument of the "pre-tribulation rapture" people is that the only people in focus here is those who were slain during this Tribulation period. Not all Christians who have died are killed by slaying. Therefore, this is only a "special group" of saved people killed in this time period.
  - iii) When one is murdered, there is a need for justice. The bible teaches that God is the one who executes justice. When Abel killed Cain back in Genesis, the text says, God said, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." (Genesis 4:9, NIV) We're seeing something similar here in the Revelation text. Here, those who are murdered are crying out to God. Notice in the text that God responds to their request. This also tells me we have the ability to pray after we die and prayers can be answered!
- d) So who are these people being described in this verse?
- i) John the writer of Revelation asks that specific question in Chapter 7.

- ii) To peak ahead, an angel tells John, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb". (Revelation 7:14, NIV).
- iii) If you believe the "Great Tribulation" is a literal, futuristic (to us) seven-year period, this text refers to a special "subset" of saved people that are killed during the Great Tribulation. In other words, there are people who get saved during this time frame. Those who argue that the great tribulation is a historical or current event will argue this refers to Christians who have died during specific waves of persecution throughout history.
- e) Verse 9 says these martyrs who were killed are "under the altar". So, is there some sort of big basement in God's throne room where these people are hanging out? ☺
  - i) If you recall from earlier lessons, I talked about how God's throne room in many ways is a model of the tabernacle as set up by Moses in Exodus. One of the pieces of furniture in this tabernacle was a sacrificial altar. When the animals were killed, the blood was poured out at the basin of the altar. (Ref. Exodus 29:12). In a strange word-picture connection, the idea is that these Christians who were "sacrificed" for their faith are being kept in the same location as the spilled blood of the animals that were sacrificed for their faith.
  - ii) The application to the living Christian is, "Does God really care that people died for their faith? During the first few centuries, there were multitudes who were killed for this faith. This text is a way of showing that God cares about them despite the suffering they had to endure.
- f) Finally, the verse says they were given "a white robe".
  - i) First, this is not a terrycloth bathrobe from a department store. ☺
  - ii) The idea of "white" represents purity (i.e., "no stains of sins"). The idea is that they are perfectly forgiven of their sins.
  - iii) This also tells me that we are "dressed" in heaven, in case anyone wondered!
- g) Does all this mean that we as Christians should die a martyr's death as a preferential method? ☺ No! If you study the book of Acts, Paul made every attempt to escape a martyr's death to preach another day. It is up to God to decide when it is our time to die and not ourselves. For some Christians, a martyr's death is an unavoidable end.
  - i) Does this mean Christian martyr's get a more "special" reward in heaven? I don't think so, but that's not the point of the verse. The point of the verse is that God is still a God of justice, and He will avenge what we cannot.
- h) To sum up this vision after the fifth seal is broken, the point is that during the great tribulation (that term comes from Chapter 7), there are those who are going to be saved.
  - i) This group was told to "hang in there" until the "full" number of martyrs is collected. It means that God is aware of a specific number of Christians that will be saved during this tribulation period.
  - ii) What does this mean for you and me? It means that God is in control. He knows how many people will be saved during times of "tribulation". God is aware of the final outcome. While rough times are difficult to deal with when it happens, we can take comfort that God is aware of the final outcome. Read the end of Revelation: "We win". ☺
- i) Meanwhile, back at God's throne room:
  - 11. Verse 12: I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red,<sup>13</sup> and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.<sup>14</sup> The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.
    - a) The first thing I want you to do is re-read these verses with the following thoughts:
      - i) John the writer of Revelation lived in the first century.

- ii) Try to imagine modern warfare, using "1st Century language":
    - a) You might describe the fire trails of missiles as "the stars of the sky fell to earth". John did his best to describe what was "indescribable" to him.
    - b) You might describe the dust of the ground being shaken up in the sky as "the sun turned black as sackcloth".
  - iii) OK, you get the idea. Go re-read Verses 12-14. I'll wait right here. ☺
  - b) I believe some of this is literal. When the text says a "great earthquake", it is a really means a great earthquake. Much of Revelation is word-pictures; this appears to be literal.
    - i) The text then says the sun turned black like sackcloth. I don't believe that is literal because if the sun went "out" at that moment, life would no longer exist and the story continues in Revelation. Therefore, the story mixes literal events with John's "best effort" to describe what was indescribable to his historical time era.
    - ii) Those of us who take this as a literal earthquake again argue that this must be a future event because there has never been a recorded event like this in history.
    - iii) Those who argue that Revelation describes "human history" allegorize the earthquake and say for example, just as the growth of Christianity changed human history is like a "world wide" earthquake in terms of its worldwide impact.
  - c) Whatever is happening, it is not good. My best estimate it is the after effects of warfare.
    - i) You could argue it is nuclear warfare, because on some of the descriptions. Imagine enough "debris" being kicked up out of the ground that it appears to John like "the sky was receding" or "the moon was blood red".
  - d) As to earthquakes, they are usually local phenomena. You don't read of a worldwide earth tremor. Whatever this earthquake was, it will be the first time in history that it is a worldwide catastrophe.
  - e) OK, John, what's the point of all of this?
    - i) Suppose one could think, "Well, all I have to do to survive this tribulation is go live in some remote island. I could survive worldwide famine by fishing the rest of my life. Another escape plan would be to collect food and go live in an isolated mountain location and try to "survive out" this horrible period.
    - ii) God answers that idea by having a "world-wide earthquake" that affects every geological location. In other words, "you can't win and you can't get out of the game". Every location on earth will be affected by this great tribulation.
  - f) There is a view that each "seal" represents a different time era within the Great Tribulation. In that view, we are now in the "sixth seal" and near the end of the tribulation. It is as if God is responding to the antics of the antichrist and the great rebellion against Him and God saying in effect, "OK, that's it, I've had enough. You're all in trouble!" A worldwide cataclysmic event happens that gets everyone's attention. That would fit the context of the last set of verses.
12. Verse 15: Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup> They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face 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 can stand?"
- a) Remember we are still on the "vision related to Jesus undoing the sixth seal". The seventh and final seal is not mentioned until Chapter 8.
  - b) Look at the types of people listed in Verse 15: Princes, generals, rich, mighty, slaves and free man. That pretty much covers all the "types" John could relate to in his day.
  - c) After the earthquake and cataclysmic events of Verses 12-14, you get the impression that everyone is making a "run for it". Whatever is coming down out of the sky, everyone tries to hide in caves or assumedly, whatever shelter they could find.

- i) Some argue that this is the fallout after say, a nuclear strike and everyone is trying to take cover. I don't buy that argument only because the text says it starts with a worldwide earthquake. It's the effects of this earthquake that is scaring everyone.
    - d) Here's the interesting part of the verses: Whatever is happening, people understand that God is responsible and that Jesus is responsible.
      - i) Notice Verse 17 says to "Hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne (God the Father) and from the wrath of the Lamb (i.e., "Lamb of God, Jesus Christ).
      - ii) It is almost as if some children knew they were doing something naughty, and they were caught and now their parents are chasing them to be punished. You get the idea people knew they were rebelling against God and against Jesus Christ and somehow knew, that God was causing this catastrophe.
      - iii) One has to read additional chapters of Revelation to fully comprehend this. In the next chapter, we will read of 144,000 "faithful witnesses" to God (on earth) during this time frame. It is as if selected people are warning the world of the doom to come. Imagine selected people telling the world, "Jesus is God and this world-wide rebellion has to stop". The people following say, the antichrist, hear this message, understand this message, but don't believe it. All of a sudden, a great earthquake happens along with other horrible events and think, "Oh, oh, we bet on the wrong horse." ☺
        - a) How different is this scenario from what we Christians tell nonbelievers today? There are multitudes of people who know about Jesus and understand the Gospel message, but willfully choose to ignore it. One day, they too, will understand that they too, "bet on the wrong horse".
    - e) What amazes me about this scenario with "Loosen Seal #6" is the lack of repentance.
      - i) You get the impression that people were aware of God, that they were aware God was behind all of these events, but still refused to repent. Getting back to my title of this lesson, "last call", God is making the "last call". People understood God was making the "last call". Out of the rebellion in their heart, people still refused to change. What motivates people to not want to turn to God? When it comes down to it, they don't want to change their lifestyle. Unfortunately, a majority of people choose to follow their own will versus God's will. They are willfully choosing the same decision that Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden.
13. OK, we've had enough depression for one lesson. I'll mercifully bring this lesson to a close. ☺
- a) The application to us is that God desires Christians to yell out (in effect) "last call". God designed Jesus' return to be "any day now". People believed that in the first century and Christians are still to live that way 2,000 years later and counting. The whole idea is to keep us on our toes. Nobody knows how long they have to live. For all we know, our life in heaven may begin today. So either by death or by Jesus Second Coming it is always "last call". Christians are called to be the ones telling the world "Last call! Get your drink now that leads to eternal life now, or miss out. Last call!"
  - b) Spending time reading about all of this horrible stuff is a reminder to Christians of the "temporary" time span of this lifetime in comparison to eternity. It's always easy to get caught up in our daily routines and get our focus off of God. Life for the Christian is all about making a difference for God. If you're not sure how to make a difference, start by asking God. I'm sure He'll show you! With that said, its time to close in prayer. It's "last call" and that means its closing time!
14. Let's pray: Father, Help us to remember how short our time is in this world. Help us to use the most precious commodity we have, our time, to be used for Your glory. Give us the wisdom, the power, the discernment, and the boldness to know how we can use our time to make an impact for You in our lives. Help us to overcome our fears and trust that You are guiding us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.