

### **THREE THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT TO HAPPEN**

*6 I watched as the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say with 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. He came conquering, indeed, he went out in order to conquer.*

*<sup>3</sup>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 authority to remove peace from the earth and to cause men to slay each other. [The rider] was given a large sword. <sup>5</sup>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] held a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup>Then I heard what sounded like a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A liter of wheat for a day's wages\* and three liters of barley for a day's wages,\* but do not damage the [olive] oil or the wine!" <sup>7</sup>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. The name [of its rider] was Death, and Hades followed [close] behind him. They were given authority to kill a fourth of the earth with the sword and with famine and with pestilence and by means of the wild beasts of the earth.*

*<sup>9</sup>When [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, I saw beneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain on account of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup>They cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Master, [you who are] holy and true, will you refrain from judging those who dwell on the earth and avenging our blood?" <sup>11</sup>Each one of them was given a white robe, and they were told to rest for a little while longer, until their fellow servants and brothers, who were destined to be killed just as they had been, shall have finished [their course]. <sup>12</sup>I watched as [the Lamb] opened the sixth seal. [When he did so,] there was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth [made] of goat's hair, the whole moon turned blood red, <sup>13</sup>and the stars of the heavens fell to the earth like unripe figs fall from a fig tree when it is 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. <sup>15</sup>Then the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the generals, and the wealthy, and the mighty, and every slave and free man, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup>They say to the mountains and to 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 is able to stand?"... **8**And when [the Lamb] broke open the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (Rev. 6:1-17; 8:1)*

*\*Literally, "for a denarius"*

### **Introduction**

Patty could hardly wait to get home and tell her husband, Doug, the good news!

"We're going to have a baby!" she blurted out as soon as she burst through the door.

“That’s great!” exclaimed Doug, as he jumped up from his easy chair, tossed the evening newspaper into the air, and ran to embrace Patty.

In the days, weeks, and months ahead, Patty shared the good news with her friends and family; and, together with Doug, she began to turn the spare room into a nursery. Those nine months, starting from conception and culminating in the birth of their child, would be a time filled with joyful anticipation and preparation. But those nine months would also be filled with such things as morning sickness, tiredness, and an increasing heaviness and awkwardness.

At the beginning of the ninth month, Patty noticed some twinges in her abdomen. In the weeks that followed she experienced contractions of the muscles in her abdomen. As the time of delivery drew near, those contractions became stronger and more frequent. As the actual delivery was in progress, Patty experienced intense pain and trembling, which finally culminated in the birth of their child.

Although they were extremely unpleasant and painful, these experiences associated with pregnancy are the unavoidable and necessary experiences that finally culminate in the joyful event of the birth of a child. Jesus tells us that the same thing is true with regard to the coming of the kingdom of God. In Matthew 24:8, when speaking about the tribulation that the church and the world must experience, and that culminates in the coming of the kingdom of God, our Lord Jesus refers to these tribulations as “birth pangs,” or, “labor pains.”

In a sense, the first coming of Christ may be compared to the moment of conception. The New Testament age may be viewed as the period of pregnancy. The tribulations of this age may be viewed as the contractions (the birth pains) accompanying the pregnancy. The return of Christ and the Final Judgment may be viewed as ushering in the birth of the new creation.

Just as the labor pains of pregnancy are an unavoidable part of the experience that leads to the birth of a child, so, too, in the imagery of Revelation chapter six, we find that the breaking of the seven seals—although painful—is necessary for the opening of the scroll that contains the revelation of the coming of the kingdom of God. In Revelation 6, using the imagery of the breaking of the seven seals, the Lord Jesus reveals to us *“the things that must occur”* (Rev. 4:1.)

In sum, what are the things that must occur? They may be outlined as follows: These events commence with the first coming of Christ. They include temporal judgments poured out upon the earth for the purpose of: warning men of the Final Judgment to come; calling the unconverted to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ; and testing and purifying the faith of those who have received the Lord Jesus as their Savior. These events culminate in the Final Judgment and the coming of the eternal kingdom of God. Because the Scripture informs us, *“we must enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”* (Acts 14:22,) we can and we must expect these

things to happen. As we study Revelation chapter six, let us consider, "Three Things We Can Expect to Happen."

## I. We Can Expect to Encounter Hard Times

Verses 1-2 of Revelation 6 describe the breaking of **the first seal**, which reveals to us the first coming of Christ. With the loosening of the first seal the Apostle John sees "*a white horse.*" The horse was a warrior's charger, representing war and conquest; the color white especially represents the purity and holiness of Christ by which He won the ultimate victory. The one who sat upon the horse held "*a bow,*" (another symbol of war,) and he was given "*a crown,*" (here it is the wreath that was bestowed upon the victor.) It is reported that the rider "*came conquering, indeed, he went out in order to conquer.*" In other words, his mission was that of conquest; he set himself to accomplish that mission, and accomplish it he did!

The white horse and its rider represent the Lord Jesus Christ in His first coming. He came on a mission of conquest. After Adam's sin, the LORD prophesied that He would send a Savior who would defeat the devil by crushing his head (a total conquest;) addressing the serpent, God said: "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel*" (Gen. 3:15.) Christ set Himself to accomplish that mission. As the time drew near for Him to complete His earthly ministry, which would culminate with the cross of Calvary, we read of Christ's resolve to faithfully fulfill the work the Father gave Him to do: "*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, he resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem*" (Lk. 9:51.) Christ did, indeed, accomplish the mission for which the Father sent Him into the world. From the cross we hear Christ's final cry of exaltation: "*When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit*" (Jn. 19:30.) Christ's first coming, and His conquest at the cross of Calvary, set in motion all the events that follow.

Verses 3-4 describe the breaking of **the second seal**, which reveals the unleashing of wars upon the earth. With the loosening of the second seal John sees "*a fiery red*" horse. Here is a horse bearing the colors of flames, destruction, and war. Its rider is given the authority and the power "*to remove peace from the earth.*" Note that all of this is under the sovereign authority and control of God the Almighty, as is evidenced in the fact that authority was given to this horse and rider to carry out his destructive mission. The specific purpose for the removal of peace is now stated: "*to cause men to slay each other*" (vs. 4b.) It is the grace of God that restrains the demonic evil in men's hearts, but at His sovereign discretion, that divine restraint is removed and, as a form of temporal judgment, men are given over to carry out the destructive tendencies latent in the sinful human heart.

In order to carry out this mission, and to clearly show the purpose of his mission, the rider is given *"a large sword."* The fiery red horse and its rider represent the unleashing of *"wars and rumors of wars"* upon the earth, as the Lord taught during the days of His earthly ministry:

*You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup>Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.* (Matt. 24:6-7a)

Verses 5-6 describe the breaking of **the third seal**, which reveals the unleashing of famine upon the earth. With the loosening of the third seal John sees *"a black horse."* This horse has the color of death, and it is a dreadful specter. Its rider held *"a pair of scales in his hand"* (vs. 5b.) The scales are an indication of scarcity; speaking of the siege against Jerusalem, the LORD informs Ezekiel, *"Son of man, I will cut off the supply of food in Jerusalem. The people will eat bread by weight [i.e.; their food will be rationed out because of its scarcity] in anxiety and drink rationed water in despair, <sup>17</sup>for food and water will be scarce. They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin"* (Ezek. 4:16-17.)

As John observes this black horse he hears *"a voice in the midst of the four living creatures"*—John is hearing the voice of God. Once more there is emphasized God's divine sovereignty and direction over the events that occur upon the earth; also indicating that the famines are a judgment of God against man's sin and apostasy, (note Ezekiel 4:16-17 quoted above.) The voice is heard to say: *"A liter of wheat for a day's wages and three liters of barley for a day's wages."* *"A liter of wheat,"* or *"three liters of barley,"* was one day's portion, and due to the scarcity, one day's portion of food is being sold for one day's wage—literally, it is being sold for a *"denarius,"* which was one day's wage for a laborer. Here is a great scarcity of the staples of life, the food that made up the daily diet, they are being sold at 10-12 times their normal price.

But, the voice continues, *"do not damage the [olive] oil or the wine!"* Deuteronomy 11:14 indicates that grain (the wheat and barley,) new wine and olive oil together were the staples of life: *"I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and [olive] oil."* With the breaking of the third seal we find that the small grains are destroyed but the olive tree and the vine (the vegetation that has deeper roots) are spared—in other words, the judgment depicted by the opening of the third seal is severe, but it is not yet devastating and total.

The black horse and its rider represent the tribulation of famine and hard economic times; note, again the prophecy of the Lord Jesus recorded in Matthew 24:7b, *"There will be famines and earthquakes in various places."*

Verses 7-8 describe the breaking of **the fourth seal**, which reveals the unleashing of pestilence upon the earth. With the loosening of the fourth seal John sees *"a*

*pale* (or, yellowish green) *horse.*" This horse bears the color of disease and sickness. Its rider bears the name of "*Death,*" and "*Hades,*" the place of the dead, follows behind him. Here is "the grim reaper" who cuts down men like ripened grain in the field; and following behind him comes Hades, to gather up the fallen and bring them into his dark storehouse.

John reports, "*They were given authority to kill a fourth of the earth with the sword and with famine and with pestilence and by means of the wild beasts of the earth.*" Death is not sovereign, it is subject to the will of God who sits on the throne, "*Jehovah brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up*" (1 Sam. 2:6.) Death is sent forth to do its work at God's command, to do His bidding.

Once again the judgment is severe (affecting one-fourth of the earth,) but not as severe as what is still to come: Revelation 8:7 will speak of plagues that affect one-third of the earth; and Revelation 15-16 will speak of judgments that will affect all of mankind. We should note that the "*sword*" spoken of in these verses is not the sword of war, (for which is used the Greek word, μάχαιρα,) but rather the "sword" of intense pain and suffering (ρόμφαία.) Upon seeing the child Jesus, Simeon announced to Mary, "*a sword [ρόμφαία] shall pierce through your own soul*" (Lk. 2:35.)

The horse ridden by Death with Hades following is the consequence of what our Lord prophesied in Matthew 24:7 and Luke 21:11,

*Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.* (Matt. 24:7)

*There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.* (Lk. 21:11)

## II. We Can Expect to Encounter Persecution

Verse 9 describes the breaking of **the fifth seal**; with the breaking of this seal the scene now shifts from earth to heaven.

As he looks into heaven, what does John see? He reports that he sees "*the souls of those who had been slain.*" What John now sees are those who have suffered martyrdom for faithfulness to the Lord—they had been slain "*on account of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained*" (vs. 9b;) Those whom he sees have been martyred for the truth of God and their faithful commitment to it. John sees them as they exist in the intermediate state: absent from the body, but present with the Lord.

They are seen lying *“beneath the altar.”* The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices was poured out at the base of the altar; the LORD commands Moses, *“Take some of the bull’s blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar”* (Ex. 29:12.) In a similar fashion, the lives of the martyrs are poured out before God as a sacrifice of devotion to Him. The Apostle Paul describes his anticipated martyrdom in these terms: *“But if I am poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and offering of your faith, I rejoice—and I rejoice with you all”* (Phil. 2:17.)

John now hears these martyrs cry out to the Lord, *“How long, O Master, [you who are] holy and true, will you refrain from judging those who dwell on the earth and avenging our blood?”* Here is an appeal for justice, addressed to our Master who is *“holy and true.”* It is an appeal based upon such passages as Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 79:10 and Luke 18:7-8a,

*Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people.* (Deut. 32:43)

*Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.* (Psl. 79:10)

*Will not God avenge his chosen ones, who cry out to him night and day? ... <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and swiftly.* (Lk. 18:7-8a)

How does the Lord reply to their cry? There is given to each of them *“a white robe”* (vs. 11a.) The white robe (στολή) is apparently a mark of honor, in keeping with the testimony of Psalm 116:15, *“Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints.”* They are told that they must rest a little while longer; since it will yet be *“a little while”* before they see the justice of God enacted on their behalf. They must wait *“until their fellow servants and brothers, who were destined to be killed just as they had been, shall have finished [their course]”* (vs. 11c.)

Revealed to us in the breaking of the fifth seal is the persecution and the martyrdom experienced by the church of Jesus Christ:

*Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me ... <sup>13</sup>but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.* (Matt. 24:9,13)

*You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup>All men will hate you because of me. <sup>18</sup>But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup>By your perseverance you will win your souls.* (Lk. 21:16-19)



It should be noted, "more Christians have been martyred in this [twentieth] century than in the previous nineteen combined. That fact is now well established ... the U.S. State Department ... stated emphatically that oppression of Christians is a worldwide phenomenon. (*Family News From Dr. James Dobson*, September, 1997)

### III. You Can Expect the Final Judgment

Verse 12 describes the breaking of **the sixth seal**, which reveals the cataclysmic judgment and destruction of this present creation. The destruction is set in motion by the occurrence of "*a great earthquake.*" Often times in Scripture the occurrence of a mighty earthquake heralds the awesome presence of God, such was the case when the LORD met with His people at Mt. Sinai:

*Then on the third day, when morning [dawned], there was thunder and lightning, and a dense cloud was over the mountain, and there was a very loud trumpet blast. All the people who were in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup>Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup>Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because Jehovah descended upon it in fire. The smoke billowed up like smoke from a furnace and the whole mountain trembled violently. (Ex. 19:16-18)*

Note, also, the testimony of the Psalmist: "*When you went out before your people, O God, when you marched through the wasteland, <sup>8</sup>the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel*" (Psl. 68:7-8.)

The destruction of the heavens is graphically described in verse 12: the sun turned black; the whole moon turned blood red; and the stars of the heavens fell to the earth. John watches as the heaven is rolled back like a scroll and the mountains and islands are moved (vs. 14.) Scripture speaks of the heavens being stretched out across God's creation like a canopy: "*[It is Jehovah] ... who stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent in which to live*" (Isa. 40:22.) Now in Revelation 6:14 the heavens are graphically portrayed as being split apart and rolling back, just as an open scroll, when split, rolls back to its end sticks; this is similar to the prophetic picture revealed to Isaiah: "*All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved, and the heavens [themselves] will be rolled up like a scroll. All of the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree*" (Isa. 34:4.)

Here is the reverse of the original act of creation, as everything is reduced to a state of chaos and destruction; contrast Genesis 1:9-10 with Psalm 46:1-3, a passage of Scripture which also speaks of the LORD's coming in Final Judgment:

*And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so. <sup>10</sup>And God called the dry land*

*Earth; and the gathered waters he called Seas; and God saw that it was good.*  
(Gen. 1:9-10)

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, <sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.* (Psl. 46:1-3)

All mankind—from the proud ruler to the hardened soldier, from the secure rich to the self-reliant strong, from the insignificant slave to the inconspicuous free man—are united, first, **in their flight**: they seek to hide themselves in the caves and among the rocks in their futile attempt to escape from the face of God as He sits upon His judgment throne (vs. 15.) Second, they are united **in their desperation**: they plead with the mountains to fall upon them so as to hide them from the presence of God (vs. 16.) Third, they are united **in their terror**: they cannot bear to see the holy face of God on the day He executes His divine judgment (vs. 16b-17a.) Finally, they are united **in their guilt**: they ask the rhetorical question, “*Who is able to stand* [before the judgment seat of God]?” (vs. 17b.)

Verse 1 of chapter 8 describes the breaking of **the seventh seal**, which reveals the completed work of God: “*there was silence in heaven.*” Here is the silence of God as He rests from His labors. God rested upon the completion of His original work of creation: “*And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all that they contained. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished his work he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work he had made*” (Gen. 2:1-2.) Likewise, the LORD God will rest following the completion of His last work at the end of the age, together with His people, entering into His eternal rest.

## Conclusion

Here in the last book of Scripture our Lord Jesus Christ reveals “*the things that **must occur***” (Rev. 4:1.) Because there is a divine necessity that these things must happen, we may be assured that they will, indeed, happen.

There are two words of Scripture that are imperative for us to remember: The first word is from Acts 14:21-22, and it is the theme of Revelation chapter six:

*[Paul and Barnabas] returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and [teaching] that **we must enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations.*** (Acts 14:21-22)

The second word is from Luke 12:32, and it is the theme of Revelation chapter seven:



*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.*  
(Lk. 12:32)