

LESSON 8

THE BREAKING OF THE FIRST SIX SEALS

THE FOUR HORSEMEN (6:1–8)

The highlight of chapter 5 was the Lamb's taking the sealed book from the hand of the One on the throne (5:7). John may have thought that either he would read what was written in the scroll or someone would read the words to him. Instead of reading or hearing words, he first saw horses galloping into view. The scroll turned out to be an "illustrated" volume whose "pictures" leaped from the page and thundered across John's vision.

1. Of what is the imagery in verse 2 reminiscent, and what might this symbol thus represent?
2. What arguments have been made for and against the idea that the first rider is Christ?
3. If the first rider is not Christ, what might he be labeled?
4. How is the word translated "sword" in 6:4 different from the previous references to a sword?
5. Who or what was the second rider?
6. What was the meaning of the voice's words in verse 6?
7. What does the word translated "ashen" (6:8) really mean?
8. What is the significance of the word translated "pestilence" in 6:8?
9. What three facts suggest that punishment was not the primary thrust of this vision?
10. Why might God have sent forth the four riders?

THE FIFTH SEAL (6:9–11)

As the hoofbeats faded away, the curtain slowly began to rise for the fifth time. John would not have been surprised to see a scene of carnage, the aftermath of the four devastating rides. He may have expected a silent and somber panorama of mangled bodies lying in the dust. Instead, John's ears were bombarded by noise—a chorus of troubled voices.

11. How do we know that those depicted in verse 9 were martyrs?
12. What is the meaning of the phrase “underneath the altar” (6:9)?
13. How can we see that the complaint in verse 10 expresses no disrespect?
14. What are the three parts of the answer expressed in 6:11?
15. What were the three types of white robes mentioned in the Book of Revelation?
16. What plans could God have had that would justify allowing more time to go by before He avenged the martyrs, thus allowing more Christians to die?

THE SIXTH SEAL (6:12–17)

Once more John's ears were assaulted by sound; but this time, instead of voices, he heard crashes, rumblings, and explosions: the sounds of a universe being torn apart. What John saw must have shaken him.

17. If 6:12–14 does not describe the end of the world, why did the Holy Spirit have John use such detailed, graphic language?
18. Why is the phrase “the wrath of the Lamb,” although consistent with the rest of Revelation, so chilling?
19. Does “the great day of . . . wrath” refer to God's destruction of the Roman Empire or the universe at the end of the age? Explain.
20. What contrasts can be seen between the martyrs in verses 9 through 11 and the unprepared in verses 15 through 17?