

# Living Word Fellowship Church

## An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 6

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### A. General Description:

The identity of the first horse will in large part be determined by the identification of the following three. The second horse and its rider are said to take peace from the earth, and this, with the words slay and sword, indicates war. The third horse and its rider surely represent scarcity of food, though not altogether a famine. The fourth horse and its rider, more dreadful than any of the others, bear the very name Death. To them was given authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth (ASV).<sup>1</sup>

Note that in these first four scenes there are no names of individuals, human or superhuman, no geographical terms, and no specific events. The judgments are, as it were, of a general nature: wars have occurred often on earth, and they are often accompanied by pestilence and by scarcity of food, if not famine conditions. This would seem to be, then, just a preliminary phase of the more terrible judgments to follow.<sup>2</sup>

### B. Chapter conclusion (unquoted information – I do not remember where I got it from):

1. **Taken as a whole, chapter 6 is one of the most important and pivotal chapters in the entire book.** It describes the first six seals and also introduces the seventh seal which consists of and introduces the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of the wrath of God in chapters 8-9; 16.
2. The contents of chapter 6 should put to rest the false teachings that God, being a God of love, could not judge a wicked world. It also raises the important question contained in the closing words of verse 17: **Who can stand?** Only those who have availed themselves of the grace of God before the time of judgment will be able to stand when God deals with the earth in this final period of great distress. Those who will be saved in the Great Tribulation are described in the next chapter.
3. **6:15-17.** The practical effect of the judgment was fear in unbelievers from all walks of life. They called on **the mountains and the rocks to fall on** them and to **hide** them from God's **wrath**. Their fear was so great they would rather be killed by a falling mountain than to face the wrath of the Lamb and Their wrath, referring to the anger of the Triune God. Again, this is not a picture of ordinary trouble but the period of greatest distress in world history.

*a) In both cases the precise reason for punishment is persecution of God's people (cf. Isa. 33:1–34:13; 35:1–4; Rev. 6:9–12). That they are also judged because of idolatry is evident from the fact they "hide*

<sup>1</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [\*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Re 6:1). Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [\*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Re 6:1). Moody Press.

*themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains ... from the presence of the one sitting on the throne and from the wrath” (vv 15b, 16b), which is based on a typological understanding of God’s judgment of Israelite idolaters in Isa. 2:10, 18–21: “You enter into the rocks and hide yourselves in the earth from the presence of the terror of the Lord... But the idols will completely vanish. And they will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the Lord.... In that day they will cast away to the moles and bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, in order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the terror of the Lord ... when he arises to make the earth tremble” (a similar description from Jer. 4:29 may be included in this typological inference; cf. Jer. 4:23–28; 5:7).<sup>3</sup>*

- b) That these classes of people in v 15a are idolaters is also clarified from Rev. 19:18–19, where the same groups are mentioned, apparently as allies of “the beast.”<sup>4</sup>
- c) The inclusive list of classes shows that all unbelievers living on earth at the time of final judgment are in mind, as the parallel in 19:18–19 bears out (see the comments there and the introduction to ch. 20). The inclusive list of classes also reveals that God is no respecter of persons but judges all on an equal basis regardless of their social, political, or economic standing. They are all alike to be judged because of their idolatry and consequent rejection of Christ’s kingship over their lives.<sup>5</sup>
4. And if the earth is also to be destroyed literally, this is to demonstrate that the idolatrous earthly securities of the earth-dwellers will be destroyed (cf. *Test. Mos.* 10:3–6 with 10:7, which makes the same connection). Humanity has become perverted and has worshiped the creation (cf. Rom. 1:21–25; Rev. 9:20).<sup>6</sup>
- Therefore, creation itself (sun, moon, stars, trees, animals, etc.) has become an idol that must be removed. The Bible repeatedly refers to the heavenly bodies as representing false deities worshiped by Israel and the nations (e.g., Deut. 4:19; 17:1–4; 2 Kgs. 23:4–5; Jer. 8:2; Ezek. 8:16; Amos 5:25–27; Acts 7:41–43). If the most permanent and stable parts of creation will be shaken to their roots (e.g., mountains and islands), so will those living on the earth. Their earthly securities will be ripped away so that they will appear spiritually naked before God’s judgment seat on the last day. They will try unsuccessfully to hide their destitute condition from the divine gaze (vv 15–16) and to escape from the coming wrath (v 17). They will even rather die from the falling rocks and mountains than face God’s judgment (v 16).<sup>7</sup>
  - Six parts of the cosmos are described as destroyed in vv 12–14: (1) earth, (2) sun, (3) moon, (4) stars, (5) heaven, and (6) “every mountain and island”; furthermore, vv 15–17 speak of six classes of humanity to be judged: (1) kings, (2) great ones, (3) rulers of thousands, (4) the rich, (5) the powerful, and (6) “every slave and free person.” This parallel points further to an intended identification of the idolaters with the earth as their ultimate idol. There are six and not seven members in both lists: the sixth element in each is composed of two parts put together as a literary and conceptual unity by the introductory πᾶς (“every”). This parallelism could also support the suggestion made above that the judgment of the cosmos in vv 12–14 is figurative for

<sup>3</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 399–400). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>4</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 400). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>5</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 400). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>6</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 402). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>7</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 402–403). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

the judgment of sinners in vv 15–17. The parallel sixfold pattern may emphasize the imperfection of both inanimate and human creation and, hence, the necessity that both be judged (cf. 13:16). On the other hand, if a parallelism of seven parts of creation and seven classes of humanity were intended in vv 12–17, then the exhaustive, unqualified nature of divine judgment would be the emphasis.<sup>8</sup>

5. The gentle Lamb who was slain on the cross is now in an exalted position over the whole cosmos (1:5; 3:21; 5:5–6) to pour out his wrath. He is not only loving to his people but also a just judge of his enemies. The OT allusions used throughout vv 12–17 heighten the Lamb’s position, since they all picture judgment coming from God. Now the judgment is seen as coming not only from God on the throne but also from the Lamb, who must also be viewed as functioning in a divine judicial capacity. This is especially expressed in the Isa. 2:10 allusion (likewise Isa. 2:19, 21) in v 16 (cf. “from the terror of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty” with Rev. 6:16, where “the one sitting on the throne” corresponds to “the LORD” in Isaiah and “the Lamb” stands in place of “the splendor of his majesty”). Likewise, the allusion to Joel 2:11 is another particular example underscoring the Lamb’s deity: “for the day of the LORD is great” becomes in Rev. 6:17 “for the great day of their [God and the Lamb’s] wrath came.”<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

### Read Psalm 37

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<sup>8</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). [\*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text\*](#) (pp. 403–404). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>9</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). [\*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text\*](#) (p. 403). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.