Revelation 6B (2011)

• The seal judgments have begun
  ○ With the breaking of the first seal, we identified the man of lawlessness’ arrival
    ■ Arriving on a white horse, symbolically indicating royalty or military honor
      • But permitted to arrive by God, hence the breaking seal in heaven results in his appearance on the earth
    ■ His ascent to power brings the world to the threshold of Tribulation
      • And when he successfully brokers a covenant allowing Israel to restart temple sacrifice on their temple mount, the Tribulation begins
  ○ Having succeeded in apparently bringing peace to the Middle East, the antichrist parleys his success into an opportunity to conquer the rest of the world
    ■ Daniel told us he would rise among ten world rulers and eventually dominate them all
    ■ He goes out conquering and to conquer
      • He obtains his initial success through political or other nonmilitary means
      • But eventually he gains the ability to prosecute war
      • By the end of Tribulation, he rules the world
      • He even places himself in the Holy of Holies, calling himself god
  ○ Satan is behind his rise to power, since Satan has always been at work in the world as the spirit of the antichrist
    ■ But Paul told us that the Antichrist’s rise to power cannot happen until the Restrainer, the Holy Spirit, is removed from the Earth
    ■ So we understand that his appearance is caused by the Lord and the breaking of the first seal, not by Satan’s desires
• So let’s return to chapter 6 and study the rest of these seal judgments

**Rev. 6:3** When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.”

**Rev. 6:4** And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

• The second seal is similar to the first seal in several ways
  ◦ Most obviously, the symbol used to communicate its arrival is another horse, but of a different color
    1. The natural sense of the text is that the horse is symbolic
       • The antichrist’s arrival was depicted as a man riding a horse too
       • Nevertheless, we recognize that the real antichrist is unlikely to use a horse as his main transportation
       • So the horse was a symbol to communicate something meaningful about the event
    1. Similarly, the horse of the second seal communicates something about the event itself
       • The color is red
       • Red can be associated with numerous meanings (e.g., love, hot temp, stop, etc.)
       • But in this context, it’s logical to see it as a picture of bloodshed
          ◦ The context of v.4 drives us naturally to that association
          ◦ Men are slaying one another, as war erupts on earth
    1. The other similarity between the first and second seal is the presence of a rider
       • Like the first horse, the rider here is unnamed
The use of the pronoun suggests this is someone we already know

Once again, we’re drawn to the conclusion this is the promised prince who is to come...the antichrist

Logically, it follows that the man who comes conquering and to conquer triggers wars

- While he came initially with only the threat of warfare (having a bow but no arrows), now he gains the ability to prosecute military battles
- From the earth’s perspective, the wars are the natural consequence of his efforts to conquer
- But we understand these events are being controlled in heaven by the Lord as He opens the seals

So the second seal is a second picture of the Antichrist as he consolidates power and begins to act in the world

- He leads the world into widespread war and bloodshed

Then the third seal

When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.”

Again, we have a horse and a rider

- And again, the rider is unnamed and referenced only by the pronoun “he”
- Leading us to conclude we’re still looking at the actions and impact of the Antichrist

This time his horse is black

- Like red, black can be associated with many things
- But it is commonly associated with one thing above all else: death
The context supports this conclusion as well, though this time it’s a little harder to recognize

- The reason is simple: the symbols don’t register in our modern culture

- The rider is holding a pair of scales we’re told

- Until modern times, scales were a common feature in everyday life

  - A scale compares the weight of two objects

  - An object of a known weight is placed on one side of the scale and another object is placed on the opposite side

  - When the scale is balanced, then the two sides are equal in weight

- Scales were used to conduct retail commerce for two reasons

  - Goods were often sold or bartered by their weight, so it was necessary to measure an exact amount in each transaction

    - The goods were compared against special check weights

  - Secondly, when coin money was taken, the coins were weighed to verify that they contained the specified amount of precious metal

    - Otherwise, people would shave small amounts of the metal off their coins to accumulate precious metal for themselves and thus to cheat merchants’

- So a references to the Antichrist holding the scales clearly symbolizes the man impacting retail commerce

  - In v.6 we’re shown the nature of the impact: sky high inflation

    - A quart of wheat and three quarts of barley will each cost a denarius

  - A denarius was the backbone of the Roman currency system

    - The denarius was first introduced in 211 BC and contained 4.5 grams of silver
A day laborer in first century Rome typically earned one denarius per day before taxes.

By comparison, a laborer working at minimum wage today earns $58 per day before taxes.

And a quart of wheat produces about 1.5 loaves of bread, or enough food to feed a family for a day.

In John’s day, a denarius bought around 12 quarts of wheat and three times as much barley.

So a poor family could subsist for almost 2 weeks on a denarius worth of wheat or even longer if they bought barley.

Today, the economics are similar.

A day’s wage today if spent frugally can support a family with subsistence food for several days...maybe a week or more.

But under the antichrist, the world experiences runaway inflation for even basic goods.

Now a day’s wage is only enough for a loaf and a half of bread.

Today, that would mean playing $40 for a loaf of bread.

If bread costs $40, how expensive will items like meat or cheese be? Very.

What will be the impact of such hyperinflation?

Panic, rampant crime, looting, and ultimately starvation for many.

How does the Antichrist’s arrival facilitate this kind of inflation?

First, we know that Daniel says this man will make changes to times and law.

Though we don’t know all that he might try to do, it seems logical that some of those changes lead to scarcity of goods and price increases.
Secondly, and more importantly, the Antichrist will produce these effects indirectly simply through the prosecution of way around the globe

- War naturally brings pressure on the food supply, since it disrupts food production and distribution
- Also, armies consume large amounts of supplies, leaving precious little for the civilian populace

So the black horse symbolizes the death of many from war-induced hyper-inflation and the resulting global starvation

- But as before, we trace this event to the opening of a seal, as the Lord permits these judgment to come upon the world

Finally, the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse

**Rev. 6:7** When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.”

**Rev. 6:8** I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

This horse changes the pattern slightly

- We’re still looking at a horse, so there is still a connection implied with the first three seals

  - But now the rider has a name: Death

    - Following him is Hades
    - This has led some to suggest that there are really five horses
    - But this is not accurate

- To understand why, let’s look at the rider more closely

  - The rider is named Death

    - In reality, is death a person?
    - The answers are no. Death is a condition
• So the reference to a rider named Death must be symbolic or at least euphemistic
  
  ■ And remember, we’ve been treating all the horses as symbolic since the beginning
    
    • There aren’t really four horses anyway
    • The horses are symbolic picturing four seal judgments,
    • Each seal judgment have been pictured as a horse that brings something into the world
  
  ■ So when we’re told that the fourth horse carries a rider named Death, the message is this seal brings great death to the world
    
    ○ Then we have the reference to Hades
      
      ■ Hades follows Death we’re told
      ■ Like Death, Hades is not a person
        
        • It is the place of holding for the spirits of dead unbelievers
        • The spirits of believers do not go to Hades but to the Lord
      
      ■ If death “comes” to an unbeliever, then naturally Hades will “follow” for that person, in the sense that their next destination is Hades
        
        • The wording is not suggesting a fifth horse is following
        • Rather, it’s emphasizing that Hades is the destination for the dying
        • This tells us that death from this particular judgment is visiting the unbelievers of the world at this point
        • And after their deaths, they are going to Hell (literally)

• The horse’s color is described as ashen in our English version
  
  ○ In Greek the word for ashen is chloros, which means pale green
    
    ■ This is the color of the skin of a dead body many hours after it has died
This is not the natural color of any horse, so this color confirms for us that these horses are symbolic.

This color emphasizes the stench and rot of many dead bodies.

- A fourth of humanity is dying at this early point in Tribulation.
- By today’s population count, we’re talking about nearly 2 billion people dying.
  - Their deaths are the culmination of the earlier judgments.

In v.8 we’re told that death comes as a result of:

- Sword (meaning war, which was the first and second seals)
- Famine (the result of war, which was the third seal)
- Pestilence (the diseases that ordinarily follow famine and war, which is the four seal)
- And even wild beasts, who for lack of food become more aggressive, which is also the fourth seal.

Looking back on the first four judgments, they are obviously connected together almost as a group.

- All are brought in a similar fashion: on symbolic horses
- Each judgment builds naturally upon the prior seal
  - In fact, from the perspective of someone living on earth during this period, the events themselves would appear to be entirely natural in their origins
  - Yet from Revelation we understand they are the result of the Lord’s judgments, as He opens each scroll
  - Even the number of horses (4) tells us something about God’s purposes
   - The number 4 is the number of the Earth in Scripture
   - So the first four judgments are designed to look like earthly events, not heavenly judgment
  - Though the world doesn’t know it yet, they were simply the warm up act for the rest of Tribulation
So far, no one on earth even suspects that the God in Heaven is at work producing these events

But that will change shortly

**Rev. 6:9** When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;

**Rev. 6:10** and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

**Rev. 6:11** And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

- The fifth seal breaks the pattern completely
  - Instead of horses on earth we have a scene in heaven
    - In fact, there is no direct description of an event on earth as a result of this judgment, though one is implied
  - John describes an altar
    - Since we know John is in the throne room of God, the altar must be the altar in the temple of God
    - And under this altar are found human souls, meaning spirits without physical bodies
  - From John’s description, we learn several things
    - First, these cannot be souls of church saints, since all church saints will have physical bodies after the Rapture
    - Secondly, they are said to be killed because of the word of God and because they maintained their testimony
    - Finally, there will be more killed as they were, and until that number is complete, the final judgment against the earth will not happen
  - Taken these facts together, we can make several conclusions concerning these souls
    - They are Christians
• Only a believer in Jesus Christ will find themselves in heaven after death

■ They are Christian martyrs
  • They are killed for their testimony, which must mean their testimony concerning Jesus Christ

■ They are Tribulation martyrs
  • They are souls only, so they couldn’t have been killed until after the Rapture
  • We’re told they are merely the first of a larger number who must be killed as they were
  • We conclude that the souls under the altar and the future martyrs are part of the same group: Tribulation saints

• Meanwhile, we find an interesting contrast between the fourth and fifth seal judgments
  ○ In the fourth judgment, death came to the unbelieving world
    ■ We know it was a death for the unbeliever only since Hades was said to be following closely for all who died
      • This told us that the ones dying lacked faith in the Christ, so they could not enter heaven
    ■ The cause of their death was God’s judgments in breaking the seals
      • The indirect cause was the Antichrist’s working through the Antichrist leadership and the resulting chaos
  ○ By contrast, the fifth judgment shows death coming to the saints
    ■ Unlike those who go to Hades, these dead find themselves under the altar in the throne room of God crying out for vengeance
    ■ These two seal judgments are set against one another to make clear that both unbeliever and believer are dying in the open moments of Tribulation
      • But the causes are very different just as the destinations are very different
Who causes the saints to be martyred?

- We know they were martyred for their testimony
- So logically, we trace their death back to the one who we know will be working against God and God's people: the antichrist

Where do these saints come from if all believers were raptured prior to Tribulation?

- We find that answer in the next chapter

As with the earlier judgments, the world can look upon the events of the fifth seal and suppose these deaths were just a naturally result in the course of human events

- They have no reason to suspect God is at work creating these happenings
- All that changes with the sixth seal

**Rev. 6:12** I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; **Rev. 6:13** and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. **Rev. 6:14** The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

In the time of Tribulation, there are three separate series of judgments: the seal judgment, the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments

- All three series end in a similar fashion: a cataclysmic upheaval of nature on earth and in the heavens

  - Like the OT prophets said, these events will be unlike anything that has come before

    - The earth has experienced great earthquakes and meteors falling from the heavens and high winds and tsunamis, etc.
    - But nothing we've ever seen will come close to the destruction the world will experience during Tribulation
    - The magnitude of the devastation is simply unprecedented

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So each series of judgments concludes with an awesome and terrifying display of God’s earth shaking power, literally

- In this case, the sixth seal judgment causes pronounced supernatural devastation
  - Besides a great earthquake, the sun, moon and stars see dramatic supernatural changes
    - The sun becomes black
      - This can’t be a simple eclipse, for it would be expected and unthreatening
      - It must be an unexplained darkening of the sun
    - The moon becomes blood red
      - Since the moon reflects its light from the sun, it’s obviously supernatural for the moon to reflect any color if the sun is giving no light of its own
    - The stars fall to the earth
      - How do we interpret this statement?
      - Immediately, we have to rule out a super-literal translation
      - A star in the universe is actually a sun, and therefore a star cannot literally land on the earth (much less many stars)
      - On the other hand, the context won’t permit us to interpret this star symbolically as we did in chapter 1 (i.e., as angels)
        - The context is of the sun, moon and stars (i.e., heavenly bodies)
      - So that leads us to conclude that the word star is being used in the laymen’s sense of a bright object in the heavens rather than in the scientific sense of a distant sun
      - Therefore, the logical conclusion is that these stars are likely meteor shower striking the earth with devastating effects
        - John describes the sky splitting and then rolling up like a scroll
It’s hard to speculate on what this could be except to take John’s words literally and assume that God is doing something supernatural to the atmosphere.

- Finally, every mountain and island is moved out of its place.
  - Frankly, this is hard even to imagine.
  - A movement of islands and mountains even a short distance would utterly obliterate anything on it or near it.
    - The tremendous forces of such a movement would be something like a child trying to push a sand castle tower a few inches out of place.
    - The act of moving it even slightly would cause it to crumble and disintegrate.
  - Likewise, it’s entirely likely that the movement of these bodies of land would leave them piles of rubble.

Where before the earlier judgments were easily interpreted as everyday human events, these judgments leave no doubt concerning their origins.

**Rev. 6:15** Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;

**Rev. 6:16** and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

- In response to these events, the world is shocked into acknowledging the reality of a sovereign, all-powerful God.
  - There are several interesting aspects to this acknowledgment.
    - First, it comes from everyone in the world.
    - John’s list includes members from both ends of society.
      - Kings, great men and rich men
      - Free men (the middle class)
      - Slaves.
No element of society fails to see the events as supernatural (how could they?)

- And all are equally afraid of the implications
- They hide in caves and mountains wishing for death rather than to face the wrath of God

That leads to the second interesting detail in John's description

- The world's population recognizes that God is acting in both the Person of God the Father on the throne and in the Second Person of the Lamb

It's one thing to witness dramatic supernatural events and thereby come to recognize the existence of God

- But it's another thing altogether for the world to come to the specific understanding that there is God the Father on the throne and the Son of God (the Lamb) is bringing this judgment

How does the world make this leap?

- One possible answer is that the splitting of the sky and its rolling away was intended to reveal to the world a window into the heavenly throne room

- For just a moment, perhaps, the world saw the same vision John described in chapters 4 & 5
  - The Father was on His throne and the Lamb of God was standing as if slain, holding the scroll
  - And just as men of old cowered in fear at the sight of angels or of God's presence, the world is now in fear of God

Still, we notice the world is not showing signs of repentance

- Though they have recognized God and the Son, they are not trusting in God nor accepting of His word

  - We are reminded yet again that faith comes by hearing (not seeing) and that hearing comes from the word of God
  - Even supernatural disaster and visions sent by God do not substitute for faith in the heart
Nevertheless, in the next chapter we do see God at work to bring faith back into the world.

As we end tonight, let’s take a step back and see the relationship between all three series of judgments in Tribulation.

- We have just studied six of the seven seal judgments.
  - There will also be seven trumpet judgments and seven bowl judgments.

- But these judgments are related to one another in a peculiar way.
  - The seventh seal judgment is not a separate judgment of its own.
  - Instead, the seventh seal judgment is all the trumpet judgments.
  - Likewise, the seventh trumpet judgment is all the bowl judgments.

- You can imagine this relationship like that of Russian dolls, where one fits inside another.
  - The final seal judgment is the commencing of the series of trumpet judgments.
  - The final trumpet judgment is the commencing of the bowl judgments.

- So as Jesus opens the seventh seal, the remaining judgments cascade forward.
  - Until the seventh seal is broken, the remaining judgments await.

- And in all three series, there is a pause in the action before the final judgment.
  - These pauses have multiple purposes, including allowing opportunity for John to witness and explain other events related to the judgments.
  - Next week we enter into one of those pauses in chapter 7.