

Revelation Chapter 6 (week 7)

Overview of the Chapter:

Revelation 6 depicts the Lamb (Christ) opening six of the seven seals on the scroll from chapter 5, unleashing judgments: four horsemen (conquest, war, famine, death), martyrs crying for justice, and cosmic upheaval (earthquake, darkened sun/moon, falling stars). It transitions from heavenly worship to earthly consequences, building tension toward the seventh seal.

Section 1: The Four Horsemen (Rev. 6:1–8) Key elements: White horse (conquest); red horse (war); black horse (famine); pale horse (death/Hades); authority over a fourth of the earth.

- **Preterist:** The horsemen symbolize 1st-century judgments leading to AD 70: white as Roman conquest (Parthian threat or internal strife), red as civil war (Year of Four Emperors, AD 69), black as famine (Acts 11:28; sieges), pale as death/plague (Neronian persecution); tied to Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24); clarifies Zechariah 6 influence, integrating as God's covenant curse on Israel (Lev. 26; Deut. 32), critiquing futurism for ignoring time texts like "soon" (Rev. 1:1).

Supporting Scriptures: Matthew 24:6–8 (wars, famines as birth pains); Zechariah 6:1–8 (four chariots/horses as judgments); Ezekiel 14:21 (sword, famine, beasts, plague).

- **Idealist:** Timeless principles of divine judgment on evil: white as false conquest/deception, red as violence, black as economic hardship, pale as mortality; cycles recurring throughout history until consummation; clarifies multiple variations of symbolism (e.g., white not Christ but counterfeit), emphasizing God's control over chaos, critiquing literal views for missing ethical call to endurance amid suffering.

Supporting Scriptures: Zechariah 1:8–11 (horses patrolling earth); Habakkuk 3:8–15 (God riding for salvation/judgment); Psalm 46:2–3 (earth gives way, but God is refuge).

- **Progressive Dispensationalist:** "Already/not yet"; horsemen as partial judgments in church age (e.g., historical wars/famines) escalating to future Tribulation; white as Antichrist figure or conquest; blends apocalyptic with prophetic, clarifying "fourth of the earth" as limited scope now vs. full later, critiquing preterism for over-localizing to AD 70.

Supporting Scriptures: Joel 2:30–31 (signs before day of Lord); Daniel 7:7–8 (beasts as empires); Matthew 24:29 (cosmic signs after tribulation).

- **Classical Dispensationalist:** Literal future Tribulation (first half); white horse as Antichrist (not Christ, per ch. 19), red as war, black as famine, pale as death; post-rapture; clarifies grammatical-historical approach, with seals as sequential, critiquing idealism for vagueness and preterism for historical mismatch.

Supporting Scriptures: Daniel 8:23–25 (fierce king in latter time); 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 (man of lawlessness); Revelation 13:1–10 (beast from sea).

How do the horsemen reflect real-world calamities? Which view best ties them to broader Scripture?

Section 2: The Fifth and Sixth Seals (Rev. 6:9–17) Key elements: Martyrs under altar cry for justice; souls given white robes, told to wait; great earthquake, blackened sun, blood moon, falling stars, hiding from wrath.

- **Preterist:** Fifth seal as 1st-century martyrs (Nero/Roman persecution) vindicated in AD 70; altar as temple sacrifice site; sixth as cosmic signs of judgment on Israel (Josephus describes similar portents); clarifies Old Testament hyperbole (Isa. 13:10 for Babylon's fall), integrating as covenant reversal, critiquing futurism for literal cosmic collapse.

Supporting Scriptures: Joel 2:10 (sun/moon dark before day of Lord); Isaiah 34:4 (heavens rolled up like scroll); Luke 18:7–8 (God avenges elect speedily).

- **Idealist:** Timeless; fifth as ongoing martyrdom/persecution; white robes as purity/victory; sixth as symbolic upheaval when evil is judged; clarifies "who can stand?" as call to faithfulness, critiquing literalism for missing recurring patterns.

Supporting Scriptures: Nahum 1:5–6 (earth quakes before God); Malachi 3:2 (who can endure day of coming); Psalm 76:7 (who can stand before wrath).

- **Progressive Dispensationalist:** Fifth as "already" martyrs (church age) awaiting "not yet" justice; sixth as partial cosmic signs now (e.g., eclipses as omens) building to end; clarifies "wait a little longer" as progressive fulfillment, critiquing preterism for no future aspect.

Supporting Scriptures: Acts 2:19–20 (wonders in heaven, fulfilled partially at Pentecost); Haggai 2:6 (shake heavens/earth once more); Hebrews 12:26–27 (shaking removes shakable things).

- **Classical Dispensationalist:** Future; fifth as Tribulation martyrs (post-rapture); altar as literal heavenly; sixth as literal cosmic events mid-Tribulation; clarifies sequential unfolding, critiquing idealism for non-literalism.

Supporting Scriptures: Matthew 24:29 (sun/moon dark after tribulation); Isaiah 2:19 (hide in rocks from terror); Revelation 16:18 (great earthquake in bowls).

Comparison Table:

Element	Preterist (Gentry)	Idealist (Hamstra)	Progressive Disp. (Pate)	Classical Disp. (Thomas)	Example Supporting Scriptures
Four Horsemen (6:1–8)	1st-century Roman strife	Recurring judgments	Partial now, future escalation	Future Tribulation start	Matt. 24:6–8; Zech. 6:1–8
Seals 5–6 (6:9–17)	Martyrs vindicated in AD 70	Ongoing persecution/cosmic upheaval	Martyrs wait for consummation	Tribulation martyrs/cosmic events	Joel 2:10; Isa. 34:4; Luke 18:7
Application	Historical encouragement	Endurance in trials	Kingdom amid suffering	Prepare for rapture/Tribulation	Nah. 1:5–6; Heb. 12:26

Questions:

1. How does chapter 6 connect to chapter 5's Lamb?
2. Which view best explains the seals' progression?
3. What does this chapter teach about suffering today?

- **Homework:** Read Revelation 7 and note interlude's significance.

Summary of M. Robert Mulholland Jr.'s Take on Revelation Chapter 6

In his commentary on Revelation in the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (2011), M. Robert Mulholland Jr. interprets Chapter 6 through an idealist lens with "already/not yet" eschatology, viewing the six seals as symbolic of timeless spiritual realities rather than a literal timeline of historical or future events. The chapter depicts the unfolding of God's redemptive plan (the scroll from Chapter 5), revealing the consequences of human rebellion in a fallen "Babylon" world. Mulholland emphasizes that the seals represent recurring cycles of tribulation, judgment, and divine sovereignty, calling believers to radical discipleship and endurance amid suffering. The "already" aspect is Christ's inaugurated victory through the cross, allowing judgments to expose evil; the "not yet" is the full consummation where chaos is overcome. He subverts Jewish apocalyptic expectations by showing judgments as part of God's merciful exposure of sin, not mere destruction, urging faithfulness like the martyrs. Mulholland critiques overly literal readings (e.g., tying seals solely to AD 70 or future Tribulation), arguing the symbols draw from Old Testament imagery (e.g., Zechariah's horses, Isaiah's cosmic signs) to convey ethical imperatives for holy living in any era of persecution.

List of Imagery in Revelation Chapter 6 and Its Meaning

Mulholland sees the chapter's imagery as multivalent, rooted in Jewish temple/creation motifs and Old Testament prophecies, symbolizing the tension between God's order and human chaos. Below is a list of key imagery, with meanings based on his commentary's emphasis on timeless spiritual truths, subversion of expectations, and calls to discipleship (cross-referenced with supporting Scriptures he often cites).

- **The Lamb Opening the Seals (Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12):** The Lamb (Christ, slain yet standing) initiates judgments, symbolizing His sovereign authority over history through sacrificial victory. Meaning: Subverts power imagery—judgment flows from love, exposing sin for redemption; believers participate in this by enduring trials. (Supporting: Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29; Zechariah 4:10 for Spirit's role in unfolding plans.)
- **White Horse and Rider with Bow/Crown (Rev. 6:1–2):** A conquering rider on a white horse. Meaning: Represents deceptive conquest or false messiahs (not Christ here, per Mulholland, to avoid confusion with Rev. 19); timeless symbol of oppressive powers mimicking divine authority, calling believers to discern true allegiance in a Babylon world. (Supporting: Zechariah 6:1–8 for patrolling horses; Matthew 24:5 for false christs; Psalm 45:3–5 for divine warrior subverted.)
- **Red Horse and Rider with Sword (Rev. 6:3–4):** Rider granted power to take peace, causing slaughter. Meaning: Symbolizes violence, war, and human conflict as consequences of rebellion; recurring tribulation testing faithfulness, urging non-violent discipleship amid chaos. (Supporting: Zechariah 1:8; Ezekiel 21:3–5 for sword of judgment; Matthew 10:34 for division brought by truth.)
- **Black Horse and Rider with Scales (Rev. 6:5–6):** Rider holding scales, voice announcing high prices for wheat/barley but sparing oil/wine. Meaning: Economic hardship, famine, and injustice from exploitation; timeless critique of Babylon's systems oppressing the vulnerable, calling for ethical living and trust in God's provision. (Supporting: Ezekiel 4:16 for rationed food; Amos 8:4–6 for oppressing poor; Leviticus 26:26 for covenant curses.)
- **Pale (Greenish) Horse and Rider Named Death (Rev. 6:7–8):** Followed by Hades; given authority over a fourth of earth to kill by sword, famine, pestilence, beasts. Meaning: Culmination of judgments—mortality and destruction as sin's wage; symbolizes the fragility of life in rebellion, but God's limit ("fourth") shows mercy, encouraging endurance toward resurrection hope. (Supporting: Ezekiel 14:21 for four judgments; Hosea 13:14 for death/Hades conquered; Jeremiah 15:2–3 for similar plagues.)
- **Souls Under the Altar (Rev. 6:9–11):** Martyrs slain for God's word/testimony, crying "How long?"; given white robes, told to rest until number complete. Meaning: Temple altar (Ex. 29:12) symbolizes sacrificial lives; timeless call to patient faithfulness in persecution, subverting vengeance for divine justice; white robes as purity/victory, affirming "already" vindication amid "not yet" consummation. (Supporting: Leviticus 4:7 for blood at altar base; Psalm 79:10 for avenging blood; Matthew 23:35 for righteous blood crying out.)
- **Cosmic Upheaval (Rev. 6:12–14):** Great earthquake; sun black, moon blood-red, stars fall, sky rolls up like scroll, mountains/islands move. Meaning: Symbolic de-creation language (not literal astronomy) for divine intervention shaking rebellious structures; timeless warning of judgment on evil, calling believers to stand firm as God's new creation emerges. (Supporting: Isaiah 34:4 for heavens rolling up; Joel 2:10, 31 for cosmic signs; Haggai 2:6–7 for shaking heavens/earth.)
- **Hiding from Wrath (Rev. 6:15–17):** Kings, great ones, rich, mighty hide in caves/rocks, calling for mountains to fall on them; "Who can stand?" Meaning: Universal accountability—no escape for oppressors; subverts human power, emphasizing God's lamb-like wrath as merciful exposure of sin; question echoes Nahum 1:6, answered by faithful overcomers (Rev. 7). (Supporting: Isaiah 2:10–21 for hiding from terror; Hosea 10:8 for mountains covering; Psalm 130:3 for who can stand before God.)

Mulholland's interpretations focus on ethical implications: The seals expose Babylon's chaos, urging holy living in an unholy world, with judgments as opportunities for repentance and witness.

Historical Accounts from Josephus Supporting the Preterist View of Revelation

The Preterist interpretation of Revelation posits that many (or most) of its prophecies were fulfilled in the 1st century, particularly during the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Preterists frequently cite Flavius Josephus, a 1st-century Jewish historian and eyewitness to the Jewish-Roman War (AD 66–73), as providing corroborating evidence. Josephus' works, such as *The Wars of the Jews* (written around AD 75), describe events that parallel Revelation's apocalyptic imagery, such as wars, famines, cosmic signs, and temple desecration. These are seen as fulfillments of judgments on apostate Israel (e.g., Rev. 6–19). Below is a summary of key Josephus accounts used by Preterists, with ties to Revelation passages.

1. Portents and Celestial Signs (Supporting Rev. 6:12–17 – Cosmic Upheaval)

Josephus records numerous supernatural omens before and during the siege, interpreted by Preterists as the "signs in the heavens" and "great earthquake" symbolizing divine judgment on Jerusalem.

- **Chariots and Armies in the Clouds:** In AD 66, "chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding cities" (*Wars* 6.5.3). Preterists link this to Rev. 6:15–17 (people hiding from wrath) and Matt. 24:30 (signs in the sky).
- **Star Like a Sword/Comet:** A comet appeared over Jerusalem for a year, resembling a sword (*Wars* 6.5.3), seen as a portent of destruction, paralleling Rev. 6:13 (stars falling).
- **Brilliant Light on the Altar:** At night, a light shone around the altar and temple as bright as day (*Wars* 6.5.3), evoking divine departure (Ezek. 10–11) and Rev. 6:12 (sun blackened).
- **Divine Voice in the Temple:** A voice was heard saying, "We are leaving from here" (*Wars* 6.5.3), signaling God's abandonment of the temple, akin to Rev. 11:19 (temple in heaven opened) or the desolation in Matt. 24:15.

2. Famines, Wars, and Plagues (Supporting Rev. 6:1–8 – Four Horsemen)

Josephus details the horrors of the siege, aligning with the horsemen's judgments (conquest, war, famine, death).

- **Extreme Famine and Cannibalism:** During the siege, food shortages led to desperation; a woman named Mary killed, roasted, and ate her child (*Wars* 6.3.4), fulfilling Deut. 28:53–57 and paralleling the black horse (famine) in Rev. 6:5–6.
- **Civil War and Slaughter:** Internal strife among Jewish factions caused massive deaths before Romans breached walls (*Wars* 5.1.1–5), echoing the red horse (war/slaughter) in Rev. 6:3–4.
- **Plagues and Death:** Over 1.1 million died from disease, starvation, and violence (*Wars* 6.9.3), supporting the pale horse (death/Hades) in Rev. 6:7–8, with "a fourth of the earth" seen as localized to Judea.

3. Temple Desecration and Martyrs (Supporting Rev. 6:9–11 – Fifth Seal)

Josephus describes temple profanation and righteous deaths, seen as martyrs under the altar crying for justice.

- **Abominations in the Temple:** Idumeans and zealots slaughtered priests in the sanctuary, blood flowing like rivers (*Wars* 4.5.1); Romans later sacrificed to idols there (*Wars* 6.6.1), paralleling the "abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15; Rev. 11:1–2).

- **Martyrs and Persecution:** High priests Ananus and Jesus were killed by zealots (*Wars* 4.5.2), possibly the "two witnesses" (Rev. 11:3–13); Neronian martyrs (pre-AD 70) cry for vindication, answered in AD 70.

4. Earthquakes and Upheaval (Supporting Rev. 6:12 – Sixth Seal)

- **Earthquakes and Noises:** "Amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth" during the siege (*Wars* 4.4.5), with temple doors opening mysteriously (*Wars* 6.5.3), seen as symbolic de-creation (Rev. 6:12–14).

Revelation 6:15-16

(People hiding in caves and rocks from God's wrath)

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,

During the AD 70 siege of Jerusalem, commanders and people hid in underground passages and caves, unable to endure the Romans or divine judgment, echoing calls for rocks to fall on them.

Josephus 6.7.3:

"So now the last hope which supported the tyrants, and that crew of robbers who were with them, was in the caves and caverns under ground; whither, if they could once fly, they did not expect to be searched for; but endeavored, that after the whole city should be destroyed, and the Romans gone away, they might come out again, and escape from them. This was no better than a dream of theirs; for they were not themselves; and those that fled out of their houses thus set on fire into the ditches, they killed without mercy, and pillaged them also; and if they discovered food belonging to any one, they seized upon it and swallowed it down, together with their blood also; nay, they were now come to fight one with another about their plunder; and I cannot but think that, had not their destruction prevented it, their barbarity would have made them taste of even the dead bodies themselves."