

CHRIST SETS THE APOCALYPTIC EVENTS IN WORLD HISTORY IN MOTION

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The seven seals reveal and execute the victorious course of Christ and his gospel in world history and its consequences for believers and unbelievers.

PART 1. THE OPENING OF THE FIRST SEAL (6:1-2)

The first seal symbolises Christ riding forth victoriously, conquering and to conquer.

a. Explanation of the symbols

6:1 “I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals”. The Lamb opens the seals, not simply to read them, but *to reveal and to execute their contents!*

“Then I heard one of the living creatures say in a voice like (as with the sound of) thunder, ‘Come!’”¹. The first living creature commands the first rider on its horse to appear. His voice is like the sound of thunder², because he must be heard in all creation. His command calls the realisation of the seal’s contents into existence.

6:2 “I looked and there before me was a white horse!”³ The horse in the book of Revelation is pictured in connection with concepts of strength, terror, warfare and conquest (9:7; 14:20; 18:13; 19:11). The horse in the Bible is used in war and to fight (Psalm 20:7; Isaiah 30:16; 31:1; Job 39:19-25). That is why Israel’s kings may not multiply war-horses (Deuteronomy 17:16)(cf. 2 Samuel 8:4; 2 Chronicles 1:14). White is the colour of spiritual purity (7:14; Isaiah 1:18) and victory (6:1-2; 19:11-16). Here the white horse symbolises warfare in spiritual and moral issues that lead to ultimate victory.

“And the one sitting on it had a bow”⁴. The bow is used as a weapon. Note that he is not given *a sword* to kill people, but *a bow* to shoot arrows in their hearts and thus cause them to live!

“and to him was given a victor’s wreath.”⁵ It is God sitting on the throne who gave the rider this victory wreath even *before* he rides out! This is a symbol that God’s sovereign decree (decision, plan) is certainly going to be executed and that his victory is absolutely decreed, inevitable and certain! God and his plan cannot and will not fail (cf. Isaiah 14:24-27)!

At Christ’s second coming the rider on the white horse has a golden victor’s wreath on his head (14:14), besides many crowns (19:12)⁶ symbolising that he had attained that absolute victory!

¹ ερχου (vnpm)

² ως φωνη βροντης

³ και ειδον, και ιδου ιππος λευκος

⁴ και ο καθημενος επ αυτον εχων τοξον

⁵ και εδοθη (vnp) αυτω στεφανος

⁶ διαδηματα πολλα

“and he goes out conquering *continuously* and in order to conquer”⁷. His single purpose is to conquer. And he actually conquers all the time! The picture and the message of the picture emphasises that he is the Conqueror and Victor. God determined it to be so and he will accomplish it so!

WHO IS THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE?

He is not named, but he best represents Jesus Christ, because of the following reasons:

The context in Revelation 5 points to Christ. Revelation 5:5 says, “He has conquered (triumphed, overcome)”⁸ and Revelation 6:2 says, “He rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest”⁹. By his death and resurrection he conquered sin, the evil world, Satan and death. By his work throughout the whole New Testament period he conquers the hearts of very many people in every nation.

The colour ‘white’ points to Christ. The colour white is always associated with that which is holy and heavenly and never with its opposite.

For example, Christ appeared with a white head and white hair (1:14). To him who overcomes¹⁰ Christ gives a white stone with a new name written on it (2:17). He who overcomes¹¹ will walk with Christ dressed in white, for they are worthy (3:4-5). Christ counsels people to buy from him white clothes so that they can cover their shameful nakedness (3:18). The twenty-four elders around God’s throne were dressed in white, sat on thrones and wore crowns (4:4). The souls of martyrs under the altar in heaven were given white robes (6:11). The great and uncountable multitude from every nation was standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb in heaven wearing white robes (7:9). These in white robes are those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:13-14). Seated on the white cloud was one like a son of man with a victor’s wreath of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand (14:14). And God’s throne of judgement where perfect justice will be executed is white (20:11).

The victor’s wreath ‘given’ and ‘worn’ points to Christ. The rider on the white horse was *given* a victor’s wreath (6:2)¹² and represents Christ at his first coming immediately after his coronation and enthronement (5:5, cf. 12:5). Here it symbolises that Christ’s victory is absolutely certain even before he begins the battle (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11).

The one coming on the white cloud was *wearing* a golden victor’s wreath (14:14)¹³ and represents Christ at his one and only second coming! Here it symbolises that the final battle is over and that Christ had conquered!

The word ‘to conquer (to overcome, to triumph)’ in the past, the present and the future points to Christ. In the Gospel of John, the word ‘to overcome’ is only used once, of Christ, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have *overcome* the world” (John 16:33)¹⁴.

In Revelation, the word ‘to conquer’ is with only two exceptions used of Christ or Christians. The two nearest passages to Revelation 6:2 refer to Christ. Revelation 3:21b says, “Just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne”¹⁵, and Revelation 5:5 says, “He has triumphed ... to open the scroll and its seven seals”¹⁶. Both refer to Christ’s *past completed action*: he conquered by his accomplished redemption on the cross during his first coming.

In Revelation 6:2, the rider on the white horse is pictured as going out conquering and in order to conquer, referring to his *present action* in world history between his first coming and second coming.

⁷ και εξηλθεν (viaa) νικων (vppa) και ινα νικηση (vsaa). The present tense emphasises that the action is continuous.

⁸ ενικησεν (viaa)

⁹ και εξηλθεν (viaa) νικων (vppa) και ινα νικηση (vsaa)

¹⁰ τω νικωντι (vppa)

¹¹ ο νικων (vppa)

¹² στεφανος

¹³ στεφανον χρυσου

¹⁴ εν τω κοσμω θκιψιν εχετε (vira), αλλα θαρσειτε > θαρσεω (vmpa), εγω νενικηκα > νικαω (vira) τον κοσμον

¹⁵ ως καγω ενικησα (viaa) και εκαθισα (viaa) μετα του πατρος μου εν τω θρονω αυτου

¹⁶ ιδου ενικησεν (viaa) ο λεων ο εκ της φυλης Ιουδα, η ριζα Δαυιδ, ανοιξει (vnaa) το βιβλιον και τας επτα σφραγιδας αυτου

In Revelation chapter 19, the rider on the white horse is Christ and he wears a garment sprinkled with the blood of his enemies, referring to his *future final action* of conquering on the day of judgement at his second coming.

The theme and purpose of the book of Revelation point to Christ. The very theme of the book of Revelation is 'the victory of Christ and of his Church'. Again and again, the Lord Jesus Christ is represented as the one who has conquered, is conquering and shall conquer (1:13 ff; 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:5; 6:16; 7:9-10; 11:15; 12:10-11; 14:1-5; 14:14-16; 17:14; 19:11-16; 20:4,6; 22:3,16). The idea of *the Conquering Christ* is as a red thread running through the book of Revelation from beginning to end!

The cross-references in the Bible point to Christ. Matthew 10:34 says, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword¹⁷." It is Christ who brings the sword. In Revelation chapter 6, the rider on the white horse is followed by the rider on the fiery red horse and this rider is 'given' a sword¹⁸.

Psalms 45:3-7 says, "Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendour and majesty. *In your majesty ride forth victoriously* in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your hand display awesome deeds. Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. Your throne, o God, will last for ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom".

The Old Testament Greek translation, which the apostles used much, says "*in your majesty (ride), and bend (the bow), and prosper and reign*"¹⁹, instead of "in your majesty ride forth victoriously". There can be no doubt that Psalm 45 is a messianic Psalm referring to Christ (Psalm 45:6-7 = Hebrews 1:8-9)!

The Bible thus pictures the Messiah as equipped with a bow (6:2; Psalm 45:5) or with a sword (19:15; Psalm 45:3), riding forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness (6:2; Psalm 45:4) and with justice he makes war (19:11). This is also the picture of Revelation chapter 6.

Habakkuk 3:8-9 says, "O Lord, ... did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? You uncovered your *bow*, you called for many arrows" (cf. Cyrus, Isaiah 41:2).

Conclusion. The rider on the white horse represents the Lord Jesus Christ that goes out conquering *throughout the whole New Testament period*. The rider represents one definite person in history, namely Jesus Christ. By means of the Word (the gospel, Matthew 24:14) and the Spirit, the testimonies and the tears of his disciples, his own intercession and their prayers, the angels of heaven and the armies on earth, the trumpets of judgement (chapter 8-9) and the bowls of wrath (chapter 15-16), Christ is riding forth victoriously, all the time conquering and with the purpose to conquer! By God's decree he cannot fail! He will be victorious!

b. Different views about the rider on the white horse (6:1-2)

There are five views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The first futurist view) The rider on the white horse represents the antichrist *during the future tribulation period*.²⁰

Second view. (The second futurist view) The rider on the white horse represents wars and rumours of war *during the future tribulation period*.²¹

Third view. The rider on the white horse represents wars and rumours of war or imperialism *throughout the whole New Testament period*.²²

¹⁷ μαχαίρα

¹⁸ μαχαίρα

¹⁹ και τω καλλει σου, και εντεινον, και κατευοδου, και βασιλευε

²⁰ Larkin, Revelation pp. 53-54

²¹ R.H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, Vol. 1, p. 158

²² Groenewald pp.87-88

Fourth view. The rider on the white horse represents the gospel that goes out conquering across the whole world *throughout the whole New Testament period.*²³ Again and again and again the gospel gains new victories on earth. The bow and arrows are symbols, not of killing, but of hitting the target, that is, symbols of the gospel hitting the hearts of people (Matthew 24:14).

Fifth view. (The correct explanation) The rider on the white horse represents the Lord Jesus Christ that goes out conquering *throughout the whole New Testament period.*²⁴

PART 2. THE OPENING OF THE SECOND SEAL (6:3-4)

This rider on the white horse is always followed by the three other riders. Whenever Jesus Christ begins to rule in the hearts and lives of Christians, they suffer under their enemies and under a broken world.

The second seal symbolises slaughtering during wars in general and during the religious persecution of Christians in particular, because Christians proclaim the gospel.

The slaughtering of Christians is nevertheless God's means to further the cause of the gospel.

a. Explanation of the symbols

6:3 “When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, ‘Come!’”

6:4 “Then another horse came out, a fiery red one.”²⁵ Fiery red is the colour of terrible bloodshed.

“The one sitting on it was given (power) to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other”²⁶. ‘Was given’ means that this is again God's sovereign decree (decision, plan) that will certainly be executed!

“And to him was given a large (dagger or short)sword.”²⁷ A large short-sword or dagger, literally used to put people to death (Acts 12:2; Hebrews 11:37; Revelation 13:10) that figuratively stands for violent death (Matthew 10:34).

WHO IS THE RIDER ON THE RED HORSE?

The word for ‘sword’ points to slaughtering in war and in persecution. The short sword²⁸ is a knife or dagger used to defend oneself or to kill in war or to slaughter²⁹ in sacrifices. “Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son” (Genesis 22:6,10)³⁰. In the Old Testament, the short sword (and arrows) was also the instrument with which God executed judgement on his enemies and avenged the blood of his servants (Deuteronomy 32:41-43). The context determines whether the slaughtering is in war, persecution or in judgement.

Under the second seal it is slaughtering in war and persecution. Thus, the sword that is given to the rider on the fiery red horse causes *slaughter in war and in persecution. Wherever people are not ruled by Christ terrible wars break out. And wherever Christ by his gospel makes his entrance, there the sword of persecution (slaughtering) follows!*

The sword of persecution slaughters Christians. With the short sword given to the rider, people slaughter one another. In the majority of passages, with only one exception, the word slaughter³¹ (the killing of a person by violence) is used of either Christ or Christians.

²³ Greijdanus pp. 115-116

²⁴ Hendriksen pp.113-119

²⁵ και εξηλθεν (viaa) αλλος ιππος πυρρος

²⁶ και τω καθημενω (vppm) επ αυτον εδοθη (viap) αυτω λαβειν (vnaa) την ειρηνην εκ της γης και ινα αλληλους σφαξουσιν (vifa)

²⁷ και εδοθη (viap) αυτω μαχαιρα μεγαλη

²⁸ μαχαιρα

²⁹ σφαζω

³⁰ Και εξετεινεν Αβρααμ την χειρα αυτου λαβειν την μαχαιραν, σφαξει τον υιον αυτου

³¹ σφαζω

Slaughtering used of Christ: “A Lamb standing as having been slaughtered” (5:6). “You were slain (slaughtered) and with your blood you purchased men for God from every nation” (5:9). “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain (slaughtered)” (5:12). “The Lamb that was slain (slaughtered) from the creation of the world” (13:8).

Slaughtering used of Christians: “Cain murdered (slaughtered) his brother”, a believer (1 John 3:12). John saw “the souls of those who had been slain (slaughtered) because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (6:9). “In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and (or ‘that is’) of all who have been killed (slaughtered) on the earth” (18:24). This passage may refer to the slaughtering of more than prophets and saints, namely to the slaughtering of people in the cities of the world, to the violent killing of people by fighting in general, by criminal actions and by religious persecutions. Nevertheless, the emphasis in the book of Revelation is on *the slaughtering of Christians*.

The only exception is Revelation 13:3: “One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, that is, seemed as having been slaughtered to death” (13:3)³². This is said of the beast which arrogantly claims for itself the honour and power of the crucifixion, which belongs only to Christ. Note especially the connection between the second and the fifth seal: the people who under the second seal are seen as being slaughtered by the sword are the same people who under the fifth seal are seen as souls under the altar in heaven. Thus, the majority of passages refer to *slaughtering in the religious persecution of Christians*, which was also the immediate problem of Christians during the time of the apostle John! Nevertheless, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the gospel. The slaughtering of Christians generally causes revival and growth rather than the extermination of the Christian community!

The sword of persecution takes away peace from the earth. This is in parallel with Matthew 10:21-23,26-28,34-39, in which Christ did not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword³³: a brother will betray his brother, a father his child, children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death!

The proclamation of the gospel brings persecution to Christians. This is in accord with Revelation 10:9-10, in which the eating of the little scroll tasted sweet like honey but turned the stomach sour! Wherever the rider on the white horse, Christ, makes his appearance, the rider on the red horse follows, that is, the persecution of Christians follows (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:17-20; Acts chapter 4 and 5).

Conclusion. The rider on the fiery red horse represents in general the outbreak of terrible wars all over the world as a consequence of people not knowing the prince of Peace (Jesus Christ); and it represents in particular the bloody religious persecutions (holy wars) especially against Christians as a consequence of people reacting against the gospel of peace *throughout the whole New Testament period*. The reference must first be to terrible wars and then to bloody persecutions, because peace is taken away, not only from Christians, but also from the earth, and because people slaughter one another.

The rider does not represent one definite person and also does not belong to one particular period in history. The world is always at war and is always persecuting the Church (Christians)! Nevertheless, the short-sword or dagger *is given* to this rider on the fiery red horse only as long as the sovereign God has decreed or given permission! All things are in the hand of God! In general God uses the wars in the world and in particular the slaughtering of Christians, how terrible it remains, to advance the cause of the gospel. “In all things God works for the good of” Christians (Romans 8:28,37-39)!

b. Different views about the rider on the red horse (6:3-4)

There are five views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The rider on the red horse represents international conflicts, nation rising against another nation *during the future tribulation period* (Matthew 24:6-7a)³⁴.

³² ως εσφαγμενην (νρρρ) εις θανατον

³³ μαχαιρα

³⁴ Larkin, Revelation p. 45

Second view. The rider on the red horse represents international conflicts, nation rising against another nation *throughout the whole New Testament period* (Matthew 24:7a)³⁵.

Third view. The rider on the red horse represents all wars between the nations as a means to open the way for the gospel *during the whole New Testament period*.³⁶ The sword given to him causes wars in which people slay one another and which takes peace away from the earth (Leviticus 26:6-8; Deuteronomy 32:39). The LORD says, “I bring prosperity and create disaster” (Isaiah 45:7). Without Christ’s permission, not even Satan can do anything (Genesis 3:14-15)! Wars have arisen because people react against the gospel and want to hinder the progress of the gospel. But wars have also arisen because other people wanted to open up closed countries for selfish reasons (colonisation or occupation for utilising the natural resources) and God employed those wars in order to break up the closure of countries against the gospel. Thus, God uses wars to open a way for the gospel into countries and into the hearts of many people!

Fourth view. The rider on the red horse represents slaughtering, especially during the religious persecution of Christians as a consequence of Christ and his people proclaiming the gospel *throughout the whole New Testament period*.³⁷

Fifth view. (The best explanation) The rider on the red horse represents in general the outbreak of terrible wars all over the world as a consequence of people not knowing the prince of Peace (Jesus Christ). And it represents in particular the bloody religious persecutions (holy wars) especially against Christians as a consequence of people reacting against the gospel of peace *throughout the whole New Testament period*. Nevertheless, God uses the slaughtering in wars in general and the slaughtering of Christians in particular as a means to further the cause of the gospel.

PART 3. THE OPENING OF THE THIRD SEAL (6:5-6)

The third seal symbolises injustice and oppression causing economic hardship, poverty, inflation and hunger for everyone in general and for Christians in particular, because Christians live according to the gospel.

a. Explanation of the symbols

6:5 “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!”³⁸ Black is the colour of hunger, worry, mourning and death.

“And the one sitting on it was holding a pair of scales in his hand”³⁹. The pair of scales is used for measuring out the rations of food, because it is very scarce and expensive. This refers to economic hardship (Ezekiel 4:9-11). There will not be enough food to share with others.

6:6 “Then I heard what sounded like (*something as*) a voice among the four creatures, saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of barley for a day’s wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!’”⁴⁰ The voice is probably of God or the Lamb on the throne executing the contents of the seals (cf. 5:6). A quart is a dry measure, the daily ration for one soldier (man), probably about one litre. Wheat was the food of the rich and barley was the food of the poor (John 6:9,13) and especially the food of animals (1 Kings 4:28). A day’s wages is one denarius (Matthew 20:2). A whole day’s wages would be needed for a quantity of wheat that would feed just one rich or three poor people for one day. A person could support himself, but not his family. Therefore he and his family would have to eat barley, the coarser food also used to feed animals, at a third of the price of wheat. But besides food, there would be other human needs for which no provision can be made at all. Not famine as such is indicated here, because the prices, though high, are by no means famine prices. Those who have money can buy as much as they want. If oil and wine represent the

³⁵ Groenewald p. 88

³⁶ Greijdanus pp.116-117

³⁷ Hendriksen pp.119-122

³⁸ Και οτε ανοιξεν (viaa) την σφραγιδα την τριτην, ηκουσα (viaa) του τριτου ζουου λεγοντος (vppa), Ερχου (vmpm). και ειδον (viaa), και ιδου ιππος μελας

³⁹ και ο καθημνος (vppm) επ αυτον εχων (vppa) ζυγον (yoke/pair of scales) εν τη χειρι αυτου

⁴⁰ Χοινηξ (a quart) σιτου (wheat, grain) δηναριου, και τρεις χοινηκες κριθων (barley) δηναριου. και τον ελαιον και τον οινον με αδικησης > αδικεω (to injure, harm)(vsaa)

means for softening pain and refreshment (Luke 10:34), then there will be some relief in between the hardships (e.g. famine). But if oil and wine represent the comforts of life and the pleasures of the rich, then especially the poor will suffer. These comforts are utterly beyond the reach of those who do not have enough money to buy. While the rich enjoy their food in abundance and all the comforts of life besides, the poor will have hardly enough to hold body and soul together.

WHO IS THE RIDER ON THE BLACK HORSE?

The whole picture is of a certain class of people who is going to be hard-pressed economically.

In general all the people who have little wages will suffer. While the rich enjoy their food in abundance and all the comforts of life besides, the poor will have hardly enough to hold body and soul together.

In particular Christians will suffer. The economic conditions which prevailed during the first century show that Christians (in Thyatira) could hardly remain a member of the trade-guilds without sacrificing their religious principles (2:18-29)! The result of withdrawal from the trade-guilds meant material loss and consequently physical suffering.

The economic conditions which prevail under the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth show that whoever did not have the mark of the beast was unable to buy or to sell (13:16-18). *The class of people who is going to be hard-pressed economically is the people who do not have the mark of the beast (the Christians)*. John teaches that his own time was “the last hour” and that “even now many antichrists have come” (1 John 2:18). Thus shortly after Christ’s first coming Christians already faced the oppressive measures of the antichrists of their day. And this has been true since that time throughout the centuries. Christians have been oppressed economically because of their religious convictions. Christians are crowded out of their jobs, businesses or professions, because they insist on being true to their convictions. Christians are moved to lower positions, because they want to keep the Lord’s Day; or because they want to be honest and just and not participate in corruption. Christians lose their jobs or are forbidden to have certain jobs because they refuse to join labour organisations which adhere to a policy of violence; or because they do not agree with a particular political party; or because they refuse to convert to a particular religion! All this is happening today!

Conclusion. The rider on the black horse represents injustice and oppression causing economic hardship, poverty, inflation and hunger for many people in general and for Christians in particular *throughout the whole New Testament period*. Many people will suffer because their employers do not know the Righteous and Just One (Jesus Christ). And in particular many Christians will suffer, because they live a righteous and just life, which offends non-Christians.

The second and third riders belong together. Both describe the persecution of Christians. Some Christians are *slaughtered* to death, while other Christians are *oppressed* (or hard-pressed) in life. Throughout the New Testament Church period, many Christians will be *slaughtered* for their faith and many other Christians will be *oppressed* (discriminated) with injustice. However, the seals do not teach that all Christians will suffer in these ways, because according to the fourth seal, many Christians will suffer along with the rest of mankind.

b. Different views about the rider on the black horse (6:5-6)

There are four views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The rider on the black horse represents famine during the future tribulation period (Matthew 24:7b)⁴¹. The black horse signifies famine and the rider signifies the conserver of food. When all able bodied men have been drafted into antichrist’s army to wage war, no one is left to sow and harvest the crops. This would lead to famine.

Second view. The rider on the black horse represents famine during the whole New Testament period (Matthew 24:7b)⁴². There will barely be enough to provide for one’s own needs, and certainly not enough to provide for one’s family. While *the poor suffer*, the rich will have luxury articles, like oil and wine.

⁴¹ Larkin p. 56

⁴² Groenewald pp. 88-89

Third view. The rider on the black horse represents famine as a means to open the way for the gospel during the whole New Testament period⁴³. There will be scarcity, lack (want, privation), hardship, expensiveness and hunger for people in general on earth as another means to open the hearts of people for the gospel (Matthew 24:14).

Fourth view. (The best explanation) The rider on the black horse represents injustice and oppression causing economic hardship throughout the whole New Testament period, especially for Christians as a consequence of living according to the gospel⁴⁴. The unjust oppressions of the poor in the world are nevertheless God's means to further the cause of the gospel (Acts 20:24).

PART 4. THE OPENING OF THE FOURTH SEAL (6:7-8)

The fourth seal symbolises the universal calamities which Christians suffer along with the rest of the world for the simple reason that Christians live in the present world (cf. John 17:11,14) that is characterised by gross selfishness, arbitrary freedom and arrogant independence.

a. Explanation of the symbols

6:7 “When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, ‘Come!’”

6:8 “I looked, and there before me was a pale horse!”⁴⁵ Pale green (yellowish, yellow green) is a very sickly gruesome colour symbolical of disease and death. This picture represents a mixture of several plagues.

“and the one sitting above it on it (its rider) was named ‘Death’, and ‘Hades’ followed with him.” This rider was not just sitting ‘on’⁴⁶ the horse, but was ‘towering over or above’⁴⁷ the horse. In the figurative sense this means he has authority (Luke 19:17) over the horse. Death in general and in its most universal form is meant, death for both Christians and non-Christians alike. Hades symbolises ‘the state of disembodied existence’ (the state where your body is separated from your spirit). The rider on the pale horse causes misery and physical death in a great measure and the dead are swallowed up by the realm of the dead.

“They were given authority”⁴⁸. Once more God's sovereign decree (decision, plan) will certainly be executed! This means that physical death and the realm of the dead cannot do what they please; they cannot go beyond God's permission! Although Satan holds the power of death (Hebrews 2:14)⁴⁹ and kills Christians through his political and religious allies (13:2,7; 11:7) he can only exercise that power when God gives him permission! It is Jesus Christ who determines by decision or by permission when anybody dies (cf. 1:18). And this fact is a great consolation for every Christian!

“over a fourth of the earth”. The territory of their divinely given authority is definitely restricted. Although many millions will be their victims, the number is definitely limited to one fourth.

“to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth”. The number 4 is the number representing the earth: north, south, east and west. The fourth seal thus describes 4 universal calamities (woes) on earth. While the woes under the second and the third seal has reference to especially Christians, the woes under the fourth seal has reference to all people in the world, Christians and non-Christians alike.

WHO IS THE RIDER ON THE PALE HORSE?

The symbolism of the book of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament. The punishment of Jerusalem by Babylon is symbolised (Ezekiel 4) and prophesied (Ezekiel 5). The Lord will send famine and wild beasts, plague and bloodshed and the sword (Ezekiel 5:17). This passage is definitely rooted in Ezekiel 14:21-22. God's four dreadful judgements against Jerusalem are “sword and famine and wild beasts and plague - to kill

⁴³ Greijdanus p.117

⁴⁴ Hendriksen pp. 122-125

⁴⁵ ἵππος χλωρός

⁴⁶ ἐπι

⁴⁷ ἐπανω

⁴⁸ ἐδοθη (vīar) αυτοῖς ἐξουσία

⁴⁹ τὸ κράτος ἐχόντα (vppa)

its men and their animals⁵⁰. Yet there will be some survivors - sons and daughters who will be brought out of it". Babylon afflicted Judah. She was an instrument in the hands of God who sent these trials in order to purify Jerusalem and to sanctify his people (Ezekiel 11:19-21; 33:11). Likewise, these four universal woes in Revelation 6:8 are viewed here from the aspect of their significance for the Church, namely, the extension of God's kingdom. *These four woes are instruments in the hands of God to further his cause in the world.*

The sword.⁵¹ Under the second seal the short sword (knife, dagger)⁵² used to slaughter is particularly the sword of persecution. However, under the fourth seal, the long (heavy and great) sword⁵³ used in war is particularly *the sword of war*. With such a sword, David cut off Goliath's head. With such a sword, Christ makes war with his enemies, that is, people who do not repent of their false teachings (1:16; 2:16)⁵⁴. With such a sword, Christ will kill his enemies in the final war (battle)⁵⁵ (19:21)⁵⁶. Thus, the first woe is war, not just one particular war, but *war between nations whenever and wherever it occurs throughout the entire New Testament period*. In these wars, Christians are also killed, not because they are punished, but because the death of Christians becomes a means of their sanctification and an instrument in the hands of God to further his cause in the world.

Famine.⁵⁷ Hunger or famine is also a very general woe, often mentioned in the Bible. Famine follows wars, but also follows God's withdrawal of his rains as a punishment (Haggai 1:9-11). Many people are killed by privation, exhaustion, misery, bad harvests, loss of business, etc. In these famines, Christians also die, not because they are punished, but because the death of Christians becomes a means of their sanctification and an instrument in the hands of God to further his cause in the world.

Death.⁵⁸ Here it means a particular manner of death, probably *'the plague, pestilence, or any other sickness causing certain death'*. 'Death' in the Bible often stands for pestilence, the black death or Bubonic plague. The disease suffered by the Philistines after they had taken the ark was, in all probability, the Bubonic plague. 1 Samuel chapter 5-7 describes how the Lord afflicted the Philistines with tumours. It was an outbreak of tumours in the city; it involved rats, the death of many in the city and great panic. Evidently it was the transmission of the plague via fleas from the rats to men. The disease destroyed the men of Ashdod and smote the inhabitants of Gath.

Famine is often associated with the plague. God punished the inhabitants of Jerusalem with the Babylonian siege, famine, the plague and finally the sword (Jeremiah 21:3-7). Also in the end-time there will be great earthquakes, famines and *pestilences* in various places (Luke 21:11). The 'death' may also refer to sickness on a bed of intense suffering which ends in certain death as a result of sexual immorality (2:20-23; 18:8). In these plagues or sicknesses, Christians also die, not because they are punished, but because the death of Christians becomes a means of their sanctification and an instrument in the hands of God to further his cause in the world.

Wild beasts.⁵⁹ After the king of Assyria had resettled people from different nations in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites, these people at first did not worship the Lord, and so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people (2 Kings 17:25). Wild beasts also do not distinguish between Christians and non-Christians. They tear to pieces and devour whatever they can seize, whether in or outside the Roman amphitheatres. In modern times, the death by wild beasts may include the great number of people killed by vehicles on the road. In the confrontation with wild beasts, Christians are also killed, not because they are punished, but because the death of Christians becomes a means of their sanctification and an instrument in the hands of God to further his cause in the world.

⁵⁰ τας τεσσαρας εκδικησεις μου τας πονηρας, ρομφαιαν, και λιμον, και θηρια πονηρα, και θανατον εξαποσειλω επι Ιερουσαλημ

⁵¹ αποκτειναι (vnaa) εν ρομφαια

⁵² μαχαιρα

⁵³ ρομφαια

⁵⁴ μετανοησον (vnaa) ουν. ει δε μη, ερχομαι (virm) σοι ταχυ και πολεμησω (vifa) μετ αυτων εν τη ρομφαια του στοματος μου

⁵⁵ ο πολεμος

⁵⁶ και οι λοιποι απεκτανθησαν (viaa) εν τη ρομφαια του καθημενου (vrrm) επι του ιππου τη εξελθουση (vraa) εκ του στοματος αυτου

⁵⁷ εν λιμω

⁵⁸ εν θανατω

⁵⁹ υπο των θηριων της γης

Conclusion. The rider on the pale green horse represents the universal calamities (warfare, famine, pestilence and wild beasts) which Christians suffer along with the rest of the world *throughout the whole New Testament period* for the simple reason that all these people live in the world. Christians do not get privileged treatment during the wars, hunger, sicknesses or epidemics, and dangers or accidents in the history of the world. Although calamities such as these cause the moral and religious disintegration of many people, they also cause the conversion of people to Christ and moral and religious revival among Christians. Thus, Christ uses these woes on the one hand as instruments for the sanctification of the Church and on the other hand for the extension of his kingdom.

b. Different views about the rider on the pale green horse (6:7-8)

There are four views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above

First view. (The futurist view) The rider on the pale green horse represents pestilence and death which follows famine *during the future tribulation period* (Matthew 24:7b)⁶⁰.

Second view. The rider on the pale green horse represents death by means of sword, famine, plague and wild animals *during the whole New Testament period*.⁶¹

The fourth rider is actually the aftermath of the work of the previous three riders. In the trail of death by wars, famines and pestilence, wild animals that eat the carcasses are multiplied. Behind them comes Hades, the realm of death, which gathers them all together. Thus, throughout the New Testament period, these four riders on horses race through history doing their destructive work *as far as God permits*. Wars, civil wars, terrorism, sabotage, violence, bloodshed, epidemics and death will continue throughout the New Testament period.

Third view. The rider on the pale green horse represents a mixture of terrible plagues which helps the gospel to complete its conquest throughout the world *during the whole New Testament period*.⁶²

Fourth view. (The correct explanation) The rider on the pale green horse represents the universal calamities which Christians suffer along with the rest of the world *throughout the whole New Testament period* for the simple reason that all these people live in the world.⁶³ The universal calamities are: war between the nations, famine (poverty), the plague or pestilence (any other sickness causing certain death) and wild animals.

These calamities are nevertheless God's means to further the cause of the gospel (of grace through faith). God uses calamities to sanctify and revive the Church. And God uses calamities to extend his kingdom among non-Christians. Calamities are God's instruments to make Christians grow and to open countries, cities, other closed places and closed hearts for the gospel.

Summary of the first four seals.

Wherever Christ promotes his cause (the proclamation of the gospel), wars, poverty and other powers will affect all the nations in the world in general and all Christians in particular. The proclamation of the gospel will lead to the *persecution* (slaughtering and oppression) of Christians (2 Timothy 3:12). But Christians will also share in the *trials* (the four universal calamities) of all non-Christians in the world. However, the wicked world with its wars and economic oppression of the poor and the slaughtering and oppression of Christians, its dangers and death in various ways, are all Christ's instruments for the refining and strengthening of Christians. Satan and the people who follow him are foiled by their own weapons: that which they intended as a means of extermination (slaughter and economic oppression) becomes a means of strengthening the Church and an instrument for the furtherance of the kingdom of God and the salvation of his people!

⁶⁰ Larkin pp. 57-58

⁶¹ Groenewald p.89

⁶² Greijdanus pp.117-119

⁶³ Hendriksen pp.125-127

PART 5. THE OPENING OF THE FIFTH SEAL (6:9-11)

The fifth seal symbolises the martyred Christians comforted in heaven with God, especially during the great tribulation.

The first five seals picture the victorious course of the conquering Christ and the gospel in world history between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. But Christ and his message in the Bible is being resisted, opposed, and rejected. Finally Christians are martyred.

a. Explanation of the symbols

6:9 "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar"⁶⁴ The altar can be the alter of incense within the Holy Place (8:3) or the altar of burnt offering in the inner forecourt of the temple (Exodus 40:26-29; 2 Chronicles 4:1,19). The context determines of which altar is spoken. In Revelation 6:9 is spoken of the altar of burnt offering, at the base of which the blood of sacrificed animals was poured in the Old Testament (Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 4:7). The soul or life of the animals was regarded as residing in the blood (Leviticus 17:11,14; Deuteronomy 12:23).

The vision of the heavenly tabernacle (temple) in Revelation chapter 4 and 5 (7:15) is continued by showing the altar of burnt offering in Revelation chapter 6. Compare the order of the Triune God: God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, God the Son (1:4-5) with the three parts of the heavenly tabernacle or temple. God is enthroned above the ark in the Holy of Holies (4:2-3; 1 Chronicles 13:6). The Holy Spirit is represented by the seven-armed candlestick in the Holy Place (4:5). And Jesus Christ is pictured as the Lamb that had been slaughtered and this is represented by the altar of burnt offering in the Inner Forecourt (5:6).

"the souls of those who had been slain (slaughtered)"⁶⁵ These are the souls (spirits) of Christians who have been martyred (butchered, killed, slaughtered with violence) in the wars among the nations in general and in the persecutions against Christians in particular. Every time Christians are martyred on earth it is as if they are presented as a sacrifice on the altar of burnt offering in heaven. Their sacrifice fills up what is still lacking in regard to Christ's sufferings for the sake of his Body (Colossians 1:24; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:5; 1 Peter 4:13). In this vision Christ is in heaven and no longer suffers to make atonement for sins, but continues to suffer with his suffering Church on earth. The souls of these Christians are pictured as being under the altar in heaven. This is symbolic of the way they died: they were as it were slaughtered on the altar in heaven and their blood (lives) flowed down the altar.

These are Christians who had sacrificed their lives for refusing to deny Christ (Matthew 10:32-33). They are probably also those who had died after they had offered (presented) their bodies as *living sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God throughout their lives (Romans 12:2)⁶⁶. To present as a sacrifice⁶⁷ is a technical term for sacrificial procedure and in serving God with different kinds of sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5): the sacrifice of living a holy life (Romans 12:1-2), the sacrifice of praising God and confessing Christ (Hebrews 13:15), the sacrifice of giving financial support to God's co-workers (Philippians 4:18) or the ultimate sacrifice of being slaughtered for the sake of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, while the bodies of Christians are in the graves on earth, their souls are directly in the presence of God in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:23).

"because of the word of God and the testimony they possessed."⁶⁸ This is said of the apostle John (1:2,9) and of Christians (12:11,17). Christians are persecuted and slain by the world, not because of the words which they proclaim or the testimony which they give, but because of the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus which they possess! The Word of God is the Bible. The Testimony of Jesus is the Revelation of God in the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and his message, the gospel. Simply because they are Christians, because they possess the Bible and because they have Jesus Christ in their hearts and lives they are attacked without reason, tried in court without justice and finally murdered without mercy. They did not provoke a reaction by their preaching, but they also did not flee in fear from those who persecuted them (1 Peter 2:21-23)!

⁶⁴ Και οτε ανοιξεν (viaa) την πεμπτην σφραγιδα, ειδον (viaa) υποκατω του θυσιαστηριου

⁶⁵ τας ψυχας των εσφαγμενων (σφαζω)(vrrp)

⁶⁶ παραστησαι (vnaa) τα σωματα υμων θυσιαν ζωσαν (vrra) αγων τω θεω ευαρεστον

⁶⁷ παραστησαι (vrrp) θυσιαν

⁶⁸ δια τον λογον του θεου και δια την μαρτυριαν ην (relative particle: 'that') ειχον (viaa--3p)

6:10 “They called out in a loud voice” because they are shocked and indignant at the injustice they suffered. Also Abel was violently killed for doing what is right, and his blood “cried out to God” from the ground where it was spilled (Genesis 4:10). Note, their bodies may be dead on earth, killed by their persecutors, but their souls (spirits) are alive in heaven with God!

“Sovereign Lord, holy and true”⁶⁹ The word in the original for ‘Lord’ is the name of an owner of slaves or a householder who exercises absolute dominion (1 Timothy 6:1; 1 Peter 2:18). The word is sometimes used of God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24) and of Christ (2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4). God is the Lord: he has sovereign and unlimited dominion and power. What happened to these Christians is something he decided or permitted to happen! God is holy: he is absolutely opposed to murder, but absolutely dedicated to reach his goal, no matter what happens! What happened to these Christians is part of his eternal plan! And God is true: he is absolutely faithful to his word. What happened to these Christians will finally lead to the glorification and reward of Christians, but to the damnation and punishment of those who persecuted and oppressed them.

“Until when ... do you not judge and avenge our blood from the inhabitants on the earth?”⁷⁰ Wherever a judge on earth condemns Christians against all just rules, Christians make their appeal to the Highest Judge in heaven (1 Peter 2:21-23)! But how can this call for vengeance be reconciled with Christ’s prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34)?

These martyrs do not invoke retribution for their own sake but for God’s sake. They do not thirst for personal vengeance, but they are concerned with the truth, righteousness, holiness and greatness of God, which is trampled on by the inhabitants of the earth. Compare this to the prayers in the Old Testament that call down God’s curse or judgement (e.g. Psalm 28:4-5). The term ‘the inhabitants of the earth’ is sometimes a term for the impenitent (3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 17:8). The Christians had defended the gospel with their very lives. By rejecting or opposing the gospel, the inhabitants of the earth had scorned God. God’s sovereign will has been opposed, his holiness has been offended and his truth has been rejected. The God of the Bible, for whom they offered up their lives, will certainly take up the cause of their death and consequently defend his own honour and justice. The Christian souls in heaven do not desire personal vengeance for their persecution, but yearn for Christ’s second coming in majesty and glory, when the sovereignty and righteousness of God in Christ will be publicly revealed.

The cry “how long?” is the cry of all God’s people in Old Testament (Psalm 74:9-10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 119:84; Isaiah 6:11; Jeremiah 12:4; Zechariah 1:12 and Daniel 8:13; 12:6). A number of these Old Testament passages presuppose or permit a context in the Babylonian exile, of which subsequent afflictions such as those of the Antiochene period under Antiochus IV Epiphanus in the book of Daniel are seen as a continuance.

6:11 “and to each one of them was given”⁷¹ Once more God’s sovereign decree (decision, plan) will certainly be executed!

“A white robe”⁷² Christians who have been persecuted and slain are given a robe. They are being clothed so as to cover the nakedness of their souls (3:18). On the earth they have been rejected and dishonoured, but in heaven they are accepted and honoured! The white robe signifies the perfect righteousness and holiness of Christ which is credited to these Christians. It is the garment of salvation and the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), which Jesus Christ merited for all those who believe in him (3:4,18; 7:14; Romans 13:14). The white robes also signifies festivity at the eternal feast or banquet (cf. Matthew 8:11-12; 22:11-12; Revelation 19:8).

“and they were told to yet remain quiet (to wait) a little time”⁷³ For us, Christ’s second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgement and the restoration of everything may seem to be a very long time away (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-4), but in the eyes of the Lord, this is but a short time. A thousand years on earth

⁶⁹ ο δεσποτης ο αγιος και αληθινος

⁷⁰ Εως ποτε, ο δεσποτης ο αγιος και αληθινος, ου κρινεις (vira) και αδικεις (vira) το αιμα ημων εκ των κατοικουντων (vppa) επι της γης

⁷¹ και εδοθη (vira) αυτοις εκαστω

⁷² στολη λευκη

⁷³ και ερρεθη > λεγω (vira) αυτοι (vifm) ινα αναπαυσωνται (vifm) επι χρονον μικρον

are like a day in his eyes (2 Peter 3:8). These faithful witnesses of Christ are told to remain quiet (to wait)⁷⁴ for a little while. They have to wait for the day that their unrighteous judges on earth will be tried before the righteous Judge in heaven.

Note again the factor of delay: things on earth do not yet seem to be what they really are in God's eyes. The wickedness of the non-Christians seems to remain camouflaged and unpunished for the time being. And the righteousness of Christians does not seem to be revealed and vindicated. But since Christ's first coming things are becoming more and more what they really are: the non-Christians are seen to become more and more wicked and the Christians are seen to become more and more righteous (22:11)!

During this divine delay of the end-time until its sudden and unexpected end at Christ's second coming Christians may rest (be revived and refreshed) from their ordeal on earth and may enjoy salvation and life in heaven (14:13; cf. Luke 12:19). And they may already reign with Christ in heaven (20:5-6).

“until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.”⁷⁵ The complete number of fellow servants, who lay down their living lives and even die in the service of the gospel, is also determined (decreed) by God (John 17:2,12; Romans 11:25-26)! God does not change his eternal plan (Ephesians 1:4-5; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:19)! The martyred Christians receive the assurance that their prayers will be answered. Nevertheless, the time of the final judgement day has not yet arrived. When this complete number has been reached, then the sixth seal will be opened!

Conclusion. The breaking of the fifth seal reveals and executes the fifth apocalyptic event: there are souls (spirits) of dead Christians under the altar in heaven. They symbolise *the suffering and death of Christians for the sake of Christ*. Christ reveals that their oppression and slaughter will not pass by without God's punishment. They are comforted and assured that God's justice is certainly coming.

b. Different views about the souls under the altar (6:9-11)

There are three views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The souls under the altar represent Jews martyred for their preaching of the gospel of the future millennial kingdom *during the future tribulation period* (Matthew 24:9-14)⁷⁶.

Second view. The souls under the altar represent Christians killed for their testimony concerning Christ (their preaching of the gospel of grace through faith) *throughout the whole New Testament period*.⁷⁷

Third view. (The correct explanation) The souls under the altar represent Christians killed for possessing the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus *throughout the whole New Testament period*, but especially during the great tribulation.⁷⁸

PART 6. THE OPENING OF THE SIXTH SEAL (6:12-17)

The sixth seal symbolises the final judgement day, the great catastrophe on the final day of history. This will be the final apocalyptic (grand and violent) event (cf. 10:7)!

a. Explanation of the symbols

6:12 “I watched as he opened the sixth seal.” The final judgement on the final day of this earth and this history will destroy this present earth and strike terror in the hearts of the people on earth. The terror of the final judgement day refers only to the godless and wicked people on earth (John 3:36; Romans 1:18). But because Christians are going to be few in number when Christ's second coming arrives (Luke 18:8), John sees the whole world seized with alarm.

⁷⁴ αναπαυω

⁷⁵ εως πληρωθωσιν (vsap) και οι συνδουλοι αυτων και οι αδελφοι αυτων οι μελλοντες (vppa+) αποκτενεσθαι (+vnp) ως και αυτοι

⁷⁶ Larkin pp. 58-59

⁷⁷ Greijdanus pp. 119-121, Hendriksen pp. 127-129, Groenewald pp. 89-91

⁷⁸ cf. Bavinck, pp. 177-180

The sixth seal will affect six objects in creation and six classes of people on earth. The number 6 is the number of man (13:18) and is here represented as the world of man.

The last day affects six objects of creation (earth, sun, moon, stars, sky, mountain and island).

“There was a great earthquake”⁷⁹ (11:13 and 16:18 at the time of the final judgement).

Picture the earth rising and falling in rapid waves as an indication of God’s power and anger.

“The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair”⁸⁰ (Matthew 24:29).

This is not simply an eclipse, a darkening of the sky as the futurist view maintains, but the very light of creation (Genesis 1:3) will be blotted out! From this point onwards the light of the sun will no longer be needed, because Christ will be the Light or lamp (21:23).

“The whole moon turned blood red”⁸¹ (21:23; Matthew 24:29).

Like that of the sun, the light of the moon will also be blotted out permanently.

6:13 “and the stars in the sky fell to earth as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.”⁸²

A fig tree also bears figs under its leaves in the wintertime, but these figs seldom ripen and fall from the tree in masses when a strong wind blows. Likewise, the stars will fall out of their orbits and fall towards the earth (Isaiah 34:4; Matthew 24:29). The whole universe with its uncountable galaxies and stars will collapse! The sun, moon and stars will terminate their light-giving and energy-producing functions. This is a terrifying picture indeed!

6:14 “The sky receded like a scroll rolling up”⁸³ The sky is pictured as a heavenly curtain which symbolically separates the human eyes on earth from seeing the invisible God. This curtain is opened and as it were rolled up to both sides. The created heaven or universe itself is rolled up like a piece of paper.

“and every mountain and island was removed from its place”⁸⁴ (16:20; 21:1). Every mountain and island will move, crash or suddenly disappear. All cities and towns will collapse and all houses will crash to the ground (cf. 16:19-20).

The last day affects six classes of mankind (kings, princes, generals, rich, mighty, slaves and free men). They are arranged according to their position, nobility, power, possession, influence or social status.

6:15 “Then the kings of the earth”,

“the princes,” (19:19). They have position and nobility and are the supreme political leaders.

“the generals,” (19:19). They have power and are the supreme military leaders.

“the rich,” (13:16-18). They have possessions and are the supreme leaders in commerce and industry, the capitalists, the money-magnates, those who became rich by whatever means.

“the mighty,” (18:23). They are those who exert a powerful influence in any realm, whether political, social, educational, cultural, or religious. They are those who by their abilities, gifts, position and influence enforce their will on the weak and the poor and helpless.

“and every slave and every free man”.⁸⁵ They are the entire lower classes consisting of those who still served as slaves or those who had been released from bondage.

“hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.”

6:16 “They called to the mountains and 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!’”⁸⁶ Under the symbolism of these six classes, John sees the

⁷⁹ και σεισμος μεγας εγενετο (viam)

⁸⁰ και ο ηλιος εγενετο (viam) μελας ως σακκος τριχινος

⁸¹ και η σεληνη ολη εγενετο (viam) ως αιμα

⁸² και οι αστερες του ουρανου επεσαν (viaa) εις την γην, ως συκη βαλλει (vira) τους ολυνθους (unripe figs)

αυτης υπο ανεμου μεγαλου σειομενη > σειω (to shake) (vppp)

⁸³ και ο ουρανος απεχωρισθη > αποχωριζω (to tear apart) (viap) ως βιβλιον ελισσομενον > ελισσω (to roll up) (vppp)

⁸⁴ και παν ορος και νησος εκ των τοπων αυτων εκινηθησαν > κινεω (to move) (viap)

⁸⁵ και οι βασιλεις της γης και οι μεγιστανες και οι χιλιαχοι και οι πλουσιοι και οι ισχυροι και πας δουλος και ελευθερος

⁸⁶ εκρυψαν (viaa) εαυτους εις τα σπηλαια και εις τας πετρας των ορεων. και λεγουσιν (vira)

τοις ορεσιν και ταις πετραις, Πεσετε (vmaa) εφ ημας και κρυσατε (vmaa) ημας απο προσωπου του καθημενου (vppm) επι του θρονου και απο της οργης του αρνιου

entire godless and wicked world of man seized with sudden fear. He hears the terrified screaming of millions. They hide in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They are trying to escape, but from what? From something more terrible than falling mountains, namely the wrath of God! Everyone feels and knows that the final judgement day has arrived. They shiver and panic and try to flee. They would rather be flattened by huge rocks and mountains than have to face the wrath of God. It will be the end of the power, outward glittering and pleasures of the kings, princes, generals, the rich and the mighty, and it will be the end of the pretence, corruption and other sins of the small people. They did not believe that it would happen, but it did! They mocked it, didn't have a care about it, pushed it out of their mind, but now have to face it! Only those who remained faithful to the Lamb, who received his sacrificial atonement for their sins and who faithfully served him, will not have to fear this day.

6:17 “For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”⁸⁷

God's holy indignation and righteous anger against sin in all its forms does not exclude his love. God's love demands God's wrath! God's wrath is God's love working against (and destroying) everything that is sinful, godless and wicked. It is his consuming reaction against everyone who rejects his love, his warnings and his correction. Christ's wrath does not cancel his love. He cannot and will not forever bear with those who want to continue to live in sin and evil (Genesis 6:3; Romans 1:28-29). He will finally turn against them and condemn them according to his relentless justice. Once the day of final judgement has arrived the door of grace is closed forever (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 12:15; Matthew 25:10-13)!

Therefore, “Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. (Proverbs 27:1)! If you as a reader have not yet received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord of your life, then do it NOW! (John 1:12-13; Revelation 3:20)

The final judgement day. When the full number of the redeemed has come into the kingdom of God and the full number of those who will be martyred for the sake of the gospel has been completed, then the end of world history has been reached! Then Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgement and the restoration and renewal of the earth will take place!

At the opening of the sixth seal, the whole universe including the earth collapses and world history falls apart. It has served its time and purpose and will make way for the new heaven and new earth, which will be different, more beautiful and wonderful, eternal and indestructible, and in which the relationship between people and God and between people and things will be different (21:1 to 22:6; 2 Peter 3:10-13). The sixth seal introduces the final judgement day. It describes the one great catastrophe at the end of this present age. It will be the final apocalyptic event in the history of this world.

The final and complete outpouring of God's wrath upon a world that has persecuted the Church will be terrible indeed! The dread and terror, the awe and consternation of that day is pictured under the twofold symbolism of a crashing universe and a thoroughly frightened human race. It is a description of what happens in the realm of created nature and a description of what happens in the realm of created man on the last day of this present earth and present history.

Old Testament prophecy also speaks of the eschatological (end-time) events in similar language (Isaiah 13:9-11; 34:4; Ezekiel 38:19-20; Amos 8:8-9; Joel 2:10-11,31-32a; Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:25-26; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 16-18-20; 20:11). The picture which John sees is very real and must be taken as a whole without drawing conclusions about the exact changes that will take place. The total picture serves to describe the complete dissolution of this present universe, the end of the heavens and earth in its present form. The purpose of the picture as a whole is to symbolise the terror of the final judgement day.

Conclusion. The breaking of the sixth seal reveals and executes the sixth apocalyptic event: the final destruction of the present universe and earth. It symbolises that the *end of the history of this present world* will arrive on the last judgement day (at Christ's second coming). It reveals and realizes the coming judgement of everyone who rejected Jesus Christ and the message of the Bible.

b. Different views about the crashing phenomena (6:12-17)

There are to views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

⁸⁷ οτι ηλθεν (viaa) η ημερα η μεγαλη της οργης αυτων, και τις δυναται (virm) σταθηναι (vnap)

First view. (The futurist view) The phenomena represent only the changing of the natural phenomena *during the end of the future tribulation period*, at Christ's *future second return* just before the future millennial kingdom is established on this present earth (Matthew 24:29-30)⁸⁸.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The phenomena represent the crashing universe and the thoroughly frightened human race *at the one and only final judgement day* at the one and only second coming of Christ just before the new heaven and new earth⁸⁹.

PART 7. THE OPENING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL (8:1)

The seventh seal symbolises the unfathomable phenomenon of delay or of slowing down the movement of history towards the end.

At his first coming Christ fulfilled everything necessary for our salvation and the redemption of the universe. He made atonement for sins and set us free from the guilt and shame of sin. He bound Satan and set us free from the enslaving power of sin and demons. He conquered death and set us free from the fear of decay, defeat and death. At his first coming he had accomplished everything necessary for our justification and the renewal of the universe.

And yet there is a delay. Instead of immediate victory, there is disaster. Instead of peace comes war. Instead of the redemption of the Church, she is persecuted. Instead of justice comes corruption and oppression. Instead of the renewal of everything comes the ravaging of war, poverty, sickness and dangerous beasts. At the opening of the fifth seal the Christian martyrs are told to wait a little longer before final justice is restored.

And after the opening of the sixth seal, which describes what the final judgement day would be like, Christians are once more confronted with a delay. The opening of the seventh seal reveals that there are other principles and powers that cause a delay of Christ's second coming and the end of history on this present earth. The revelation of the seventh seal caused silence in heaven.

The opening of the seals reveals the irresistible powerful forward movement of God's history of salvation and judgement towards its final end. But there are forces that slow God's history of salvation and judgement down and bring delay.

The first delaying factor is the Church that is not fulfilling her missionary calling enough (chapters 2 and 3; Matthew 24:14).

The second delaying factor is the Church that is too little a praying Church (8:3-5; James 4:2-3).

The third delaying factor is that the real nature of the world is still camouflaged and must be fully revealed as being godless and wicked. All things must become what they really are. But this will only become clear right at the end. In the mean time: "Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; let him who is holy continue to be holy" (22:11).

Only by way of the battering sledgehammer on this camouflaged world will man become man in the worst sense of the word. Man will be revealed to be a rebel, slave and unrepentant. The history of this world is not really that certain events are taking place, but rather that through these events, through prosperity and misfortunes, through wars and peace, through the increase of science and culture everything is finally becoming what it always has been! That is why the kingdom of the Son of Man in its final perfect phase can only come when the kingdom of the beast up to the last antichrist has had this world in its grip!⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Larkin pp. 60-61

⁸⁹ Greijdanus pp. 121-123, Hendriksen pp. 129-132, Groenewald pp. 91-93

⁹⁰ cf. Bavinck, pp. 229-231

Conclusion. The breaking of the seventh seal reveals and executes the seventh apocalyptic event: the half an hour of silence and symbolises *the reasons for the delay of Christ's second coming and the end of the present age of suffering*. There are three reasons: the lack of doing missions; the lack of prayer; and the fruition of the wickedness on earth.