

**UNDERSTANDING END TIMES PROPHECY  
FOCUS #6—THE TRIBULATION PERIOD  
REVELATION 6:1-18:24**

Our next focus is on the tribulation period itself. The Scriptures are full of passages that mention this period of time in a general way or mention one of the specific events that occur during this period. However, we will focus on two specific portions of Scripture.

In Matthew 24, Christ begins what we call the Olivet Discourse in response to the disciples' questions regarding the coming of Christ and the end of the age. Matthew 24-25 gives a brief description of this period that is described in detail in Revelation 6-18.

Keep in mind that the church (all genuine believers) has been raptured and is in the presence of God in worship before the throne (cf. Revelation 4-5). The time has come for the outpouring of God's divine wrath upon the world. This outpouring will take place by the breaking of the seven seals on the scroll. The seven seal judgments will stretch throughout the entire seven year tribulation.

The first six seals parallel Jesus comments on the end times in His great Olivet Discourse recorded in Matthew 24. In fact Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 are very similar in how they describe this period of time.

The first 4 seals are the "beginning of birth pangs" (Matthew 24:8). The first four seals will make up the first 3 ½ years of the tribulation. The fifth seal will begin in the first half and carry into the second half, while the sixth seal seems to be initiated at the mid-point of the tribulation (Matthew 24:15-6, Revelation 6:15-17).

The seventh seal reveals the trumpet and bowl judgments, which are considered to be the outpouring of God's wrath during the second half of the tribulation often termed the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21). John is given a vivid, symbolic description of literal events that will take place on the earth.

**THE FIRST HALF OF THE TRIBULATION (Revelation 6:1-8; Matthew 24:5-9)**

***The First Seal Judgment: [The Rise of False Messiahs, The Antichrist & Peace]***

*"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.  
(Matthew 24:5)*

*Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. (Revelation 6:1-2)*

At this point the Lamb breaks the first of seven seals. Immediately John hears one of the four living beings speak (see Revelation 4-5). This living being spoke with a loud thunderous voice. This was a voice of power and authority. This living being said, "Come!" As in each of the first four seals a horse and rider appears following such a command.

The living being is calling forth the first rider. These first four seals are often referred to as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. As each rider is summoned to come onto the scene and bring forth God's judgment upon the earth, John is privileged to get a glimpse of what is taking place. After the breaking of this first seal, John witnessed a white horse. On the white horse is a rider who possessed a bow without arrows and a crown. The activity of this rider was to go out and conquer.

There exists some disagreement upon the identity of this particular rider. Most believe that these riders are symbolic of events taking place on the earth. While the last three are easily identifiable, this first one is more debated. While some see it as Christ, most believe it is representative of the antichrist.

It is of first importance to notice the context. The last three riders as we will discover represent an impersonal force such as war, famine and death. It would seem since the language is the same here that this horseman also represents an impersonal force.

The proper understanding is best harmonized with Matthew 24:4-5 where Christ announced that many would come in His name attempting to mislead many. This first seal is the rise of many false christs going out to mislead and conquer the many. This will ultimately culminate in the rise of the antichrist, who will come onto the scene misleading many into a false sense of security.

He will usher in a false peace winning many bloodless victories as he conquers the world. "He will not conquer by military force but by cunning and deceit (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11). His conquest will be a 'cold war' victory, a peace won by agreement, not conflict (Daniel 9:24-27).

### ***The Second Seal Judgment: [War]***

*"You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom..." (Matthew 24:6-7)*

*When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." 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. (Revelation 6:3-4)*

The second seal is broken and a second horseman is summoned. This time the horse is a fiery red and its rider was given permission to take peace from the earth.

The result will be widespread bloodshed and war upon the earth. First of all the color of this second horse as a fiery red is symbolic of war and bloodshed. Second the rider was given permission to take away the peace from the earth and once again emphasizing conflict and war.

The result of this seal is mentioned that men will slay one another. This is not speaking of something rare or abnormal, but of the common place. After the breaking of this second seal, men slaying one another will become common place. Violent slaughters will be the norm. Wars will break out all over the face of the earth.

The false peace of antichrist will be short lived and his true nature revealed (a man of war). John also notes that a great sword was given to the rider. *Machaira* (sword) refers to the short stabbing sword a Roman soldier carried into battle. It was also a weapon used by assassins.

The vision depicts a great sword to describe the extent of the war. Antichrist's false peace, then will dissolve in a maelstrom of battle, assassination, rebellion, revolt, and massacre.

Jesus said of this time, "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for [those things] must take place, but [that] is not yet the end. "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:6-7).

Even the first half of the tribulation period will be violent, chaotic and tumultuous. It is probably during the period of the second seal judgment that the invasion of Israel (Ezekiel 38-39) takes place.

### ***The Third Seal Judgment: [Famine]***

*"...and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes."* [Matthew 24:7]

*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."* [Revelation 6:5-6]

In Revelation 6, the breaking of the third seal results in a third rider, this time on a black horse and this rider is carrying a pair of scales in his hand. The rider on this black horse holding the scales is representative of a world-wide famine.

Jesus also predicted this famine in His Olivet Discourse. The Scales in the rider's hand

picture the rationing that will take place as a result of the famine across the world. Food will be rationed. Food lines will likely be set up to distribute the food. After the appearance of the rider, John heard a voice speaking forth in regards to this seal. This voice coming in the center of the four living beings could possibly be the voice of God as the living beings were stationed around the throne.

The pronouncements of this voice reveal how devastating the famine conditions will be. A quart of wheat is barely enough to sustain one person for one day, while a denarius represents one day's wages for an average worker. Those who are working will barely be able to provide enough food for themselves let alone for their entire family.

Those with families will be able to purchase three quarts of barley for a denarius. That will provide food for their families, but barley is low in nutritional value and during New Testament times was commonly fed to livestock.

Thus, a person's wages will barely feed three people with low quality food. Both of those scenarios represent starvation wages, and signify severe famine conditions. The famine will be extremely severe. The Great Depression will not hold a candle to the widespread hunger during this time period.

The comment not to damage the oil or the wine emphasizes the scarcity of such items. They were commonly used in the preparation and cooking process as well as in water purification; however they will be scarce during this future famine. Only the very rich will be able to afford them.

### ***The Fourth Seal Judgment: [Death]***

*“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. “But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. (Matthew 24:7-9)*

*When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.” 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. (Revelation 6:7-8)*

The Lamb breaks the fourth seal and the fourth horseman is summoned, Come! This fourth horse is an ashen color. *Chloros* (ashen), from which the English words *chlorophyll* and *chlorine* derive, refers to a sickly, pale, yellow-green color. This is the color of death and this horse's rider is named death. It is here where 1/4 of the earth's population dies.

Death is not so uncommon after war and widespread famine. The world's population is currently just over 6 billion (1999). By today's standard that would mean that 1.5 billion people would die as a result of this seal judgment. Obviously if the LORD tarries that number could be greater.

The mention of Hades is likely a reference to the grave and not to Hell. Death and Hades are also mentioned together in Revelation 1:18 and 20:13-14.

It is important to note that authority was given to this rider to kill 1/4 of the population. That authority is obviously from the One who is sitting on the throne. God granted the authority for 1/4 of the world's population to be put to death.

Some may have difficulty thinking that a loving God would allow such a thing. Remember that God is pouring out His divine wrath upon a sinful unbelieving world. He is judging the world for its rejection of Him. He is in sovereign control and is exacting His righteous justice upon the world. This judgment will come by the sword (the second seal judgment), famine (the third seal judgment, pestilence, and by wild beasts.

Pestilence translates THANATOS, the same word translated death in verse 8. Here it may primarily refer to disease as the cause of death (cf. Revelation 2:23; 18:8), but is broad enough to encompass natural disasters such as the earthquakes predicted by Jesus (Matthew 24:7), as well as floods, and volcanic eruptions. It could also refer to the effects of biological and chemical weapons. It is a statement of fact that throughout history, disease has killed more people than war.

The inclusion of the term by wild beasts is a confusing one and almost seems as if does not fit. It could be attributed to the famine and that normally docile animals become wild from starvation or it could be a reference to rodents, which often carry disease. Whatever the case 1/4 of the earth's population will perish from war, famine, disease, and wild beasts.

**Summary:**

These first four seal judgments often referred to as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse unleash the beginning birth pangs of God's judgment upon the world.

- 1) We will see the rise of false messiahs and a false peace culminating in the rise of the antichrist and his pseudo peace through wicked deception.
- 2) We will see that world-wide warfare and bloodshed break out. Supposed peace and prosperity will turn to conflict.
- 3) As a result of such warfare, a devastating world wide famine will break out. A full days salary will barely buy food for one person for one day. There will be a strict rationing of food as well as long food lines and widespread starvation.

4) As a result of the world war, the world-wide famine, widespread disease (possibly other natural disasters), and from wild beasts, ¼ of the earth's population will perish.

These first 3 1/2 years of the tribulation period will be very destructive and devastating, but the worst is yet to come.

Many people are struggling through difficult times. The people of various nations are being oppressed especially by hard line regimes such as North Korea, Iran and others. Unemployment, not just here in California, but nationwide and in some sense worldwide has caused many people to suffer. These difficult economic times have created widespread hunger. For example, Fox News reported that there were lines for food subsidies in Southern California. In fact the state of California, as we all know, is in such a budget crisis (26 billion dollar deficit) that we are now issuing IOU's. Wars (Iraq, and Afghanistan) and rumors of wars (Iran and North Korea) create a very unsettling atmosphere around the world.

There is no doubt that we are going through difficult times, but this will pale in comparison to a future time spoken of in Revelation 6:1-18:24. The church will be abruptly removed from the world at the rapture, creating widespread chaos, turmoil and fear. The people who are left will be in a panic as the world asks questions, tries to clean up and put things back together. What happened? Who will be next? What do we do now? The world will be in need of a leader. Many will come proclaiming to be Christ. Indeed many have already come with such claims. But one will appear to be a savior as he brokers a peace treaty between Israel and her neighbors. Peace in the Middle East? Peace at such turbulent times? What a really great guy!

This ruler will rise to power in some sort of new Roman Empire with a ten-fold division centered in Europe. Unfortunately, Israel's enemies are fuming. They will unify together (Russia, Turkey, Iran, Libya, the Sudan, and the nations from the former underbelly of the Soviet Union) and come against Israel in a massive attack. It is at this time that God comes up against these nations and obliterates them demonstrating to the world that the God of Israel is indeed the one true God. And this is only the beginning.

We began looking at this future time, the Tribulation Period, last week when we covered the first four seal judgments of Revelation 6. What were the first four seal judgments?

***The First Seal Judgment: The Rise of False Messiahs, The Antichrist & Apparent Peace (Matthew 24:5; Revelation 6:1-2)***

***The Second Seal Judgment: War (Matthew 24:6-7; Revelation 6:3-4)***

***The Third Seal Judgment: Famine (Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:5-6)***

**The Fourth Seal Judgment: Death (Matthew 24:7-9; Revelation 6:7-8)**

Now we move on in our study to look at the next two seal judgments:

**The Fifth Seal Judgment: Martyrdom (Revelation 6:9-11)**

*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; 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?" 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. (Revelation 6:9-11)*

1) *The Identity of the Slain:* After the breaking of the 5th seal by the Lamb. We do not see a direct judgment of God carried out on the earth. What we are given is another picture of heaven, which reveals the results of the fifth seal. The breaking of the 5th seal reveals the souls of slain individuals under the altar of God. These individuals were obviously martyrs for Christ. Since believers were raptured prior to the pouring out of God's wrath on the earth, these martyrs here are those who came to Christ during the tribulation period. So these are tribulation martyrs. Obviously there will be wide spread persecution of believers even during the early part of the tribulation.

This judgment is also parallel with Christ's comments in the Olivet discourse in Matthew 24 where Christ says in verse 9, "*Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.*" This persecution will begin during the first half of the tribulation because the abomination of desolation is not mentioned until verse 15 of Matthew 24. It seems only obvious that after the abomination of desolation when the antichrist proclaims himself to be God, that this persecution will intensify. Although this martyrdom begins during the first half it will carry on into and intensify in the second half. "Revelation 7:9-14 indicates that the slaughter will be on a massive scale, resulting in victims from every nation too numerous to count." The reason for the persecution and slaughter is evident. The text says that it was because of the **Word of God** and because of their **testimony**, which they maintained. These new believers were committed to proclaiming the message of the Bible and they were loyal to Christ. As a result they will suffer persecution and slaughter likely at the hands of the antichrist and his one world government.

2) *The Petition of the Slain:* We are told that these slain believers are making a petition to God. It is of first importance that we should note that these believers are mentioned as souls. This indicates that they have not yet been raised in resurrected bodies. Yes their souls are in heaven enjoying rest and worship, but they have not yet received their resurrection bodies. It is also important to note that they are making petition to God from underneath an altar. This is likely a symbolic reference to the altar of incense from the Old Testament (Exodus 40:5). The altar of incense was closely associated with the

prayers of the people. The petition they make is an intense one. "KRAZO (cried out) is a strong word that emphasizes the urgent need and denotes strong emotions." They are making a strong emotional plea for God to avenge their blood.

They also appeal to God's attributes of being holy and true. God is holy and must judge sin and He is true and faithful to keep His promises. This is not a sinful revenge that these martyrs have, but it is a strong desire to see God's justice poured out upon an unbelieving and rejecting world.

3) *The Promise to the Slain*: God gives these martyrs a two-fold promise here. First of all they are given a symbolic gift of a white robe. These white robes throughout scripture symbolize God's gift of eternal righteousness and glory, which the redeemed will enjoy in heaven. Second, He tells them that they must wait just a little while longer. They are to continue to enjoy their rest in heaven for a bit longer until the martyrdom is complete. God has in His sovereignty pre-determined the number of martyrs from this period of persecution. The promise is that God will indeed continue to pour out His wrath upon this unbelieving world at the appointed time.

### ***The Sixth Seal Judgment: Various Natural Disasters (Revelation 6:12-17)***

*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; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 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; 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?" (Revelation 6:12-17)*

At the breaking of the 6th seal an unbelievable time of destruction upon the earth is revealed. God' judgment now intensifies upon the world. This particular judgment occurs just after the mid-point of the tribulation. The actual mid-point is the abomination of desolation recorded in Matthew 24:15.

Likely following antichrist's proclamation to be God, God Himself will unleash this devastating judgment upon the world. In Christ's Olivet discourse similar terminology is used in verses 16-29, especially in verse 29. The breaking of the 6th seal reveals 5 major devastating judgments:

1) *A Great Earthquake*: This is an unbelievably huge worldwide earthquake. Many of us have experienced an earthquake to some extent, but nothing compared to this quake to come just after the half-way point of the tribulation. Henry Morris explains this to some extent in his commentary on Revelation:



“The great earthquake described here... for the first time in history is worldwide in scope. Seismologists and geophysicists in recent years have learned a great deal about the structure of the Earth and about the cause and nature of earthquakes.

The earth's solid crust is traversed with a complex network of faults, with all resting upon a plastic mantle whose structure is still largely unknown. Whether the crust consists of great moving plates is a current matter of controversy among geophysicists, so the ultimate cause of earthquakes is still not known.

In all likelihood, the entire complex of crustal instabilities is a remnant of the phenomena of the great Flood, especially the breakup of the fountains of the great deep. "In any case, the vast worldwide network of unstable earthquake belts around the world suddenly will begin to slip and fracture on a global basis and a gigantic earthquake will ensue.

This is evidently and naturally, accompanied by tremendous volcanic eruptions, spewing vast quantities of dust and steam and gases into the upper atmosphere. It is probably these that will cause the sun to be darkened and the moon to appear blood-red."

2) *The Sun Darkened/The Moon Like Blood*: This as stated above by Henry Morris is likely a result of the volcanic gases and steam let loose from the movement of faults during the great earthquake. The sun will supposedly become as black as sackcloth made of hair. "Sackcloth was rough cloth worn by mourners, usually made from the hair of black goats.

Following the violent earthquake that devastates the earth, the sun will turn as black as a mourner's robe." The appearance of the moon will also be affected, as it will become like blood. It will have a blood red appearance. Other passages speak of these events with similar terminology (cf. Matthew 24, Joel 2, & Isaiah 13).

"There will be vast amounts of ash and smoke spewed out by the volcanic activity associated with the great worldwide earthquake. That ash and smoke will eclipse the moon, coloring it blood red as it attempts to pierce the smoke-darkened sky. These phenomena will affect every aspect of life as the normal cycle of daylight and darkness is disrupted. The total eclipse of the sun and moon will add more reason for the world to be in panic."

3) *The Stars of the Sky Fell to the Earth*: These are not literal stars since they are much too large to fall upon the earth and would incinerate it long before impact. These are likely a reference to meteors, asteroid showers or comets.

"ASTERAS (stars) can refer to actual stars, but can also describe any heavenly body other than the sun and the moon." These, in and of themselves can be quite devastating, and many scientists warn of the possibility of such destruction. John does give us an illustration of how dramatic this event will be. He says that they will fall to the earth like a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. These fiery objects coming out of the darkness of Earth's sky will pummel the earth.

4) *The Sky Will Be Split Apart*: This is an unusual atmospheric condition. It is likely that each of the previous disasters have in some way affected the earth's atmosphere to give this unusual appearance. John describes it as the sky being rolled up like a scroll. Keep in mind that this is from a human perspective as John struggles to describe what he is witnessing. The result of this judgment is some sort of damage to the Earth's atmosphere.

5) *Mountains & Islands Moved Out of Place*: The incredible disaster is not over yet. John informs us that every mountain and island will be moved out of its place. Not just a few, but every single one of them. This is not good for those of us who live near mountain ranges.

Dr. Henry Morris explains this event: "The earth's crust, highly unstable ever since the great Flood, will be so disturbed by the impacting asteroids, the volcanic explosions, and the worldwide earthquakes, that great segments of it will actually begin to slip and slide over the earth's deep mantle.

Geophysicists for many years have been fascinated with the idea of 'continental drift' (although strong evidence has been accumulating against any such phenomenon occurring in the present age). Several have published theories of a past naturalistic catastrophism involving what they call 'the earth's shifting crust.' Some such phenomenon may actually be triggered under this judgment of the sixth seal, dwarfing the damage occasioned by all the mighty earthquakes of the past."

6) *The Reaction of Earth's Residents*: Obviously this will be a terrifying time for the people of the world. As John explains it will affect a wide range of people. The heads of state, the high-ranking governmental officials, the wealthy, and the poor; all will be affected. Everyone will be severely impacted by this terrifying judgment. The world however will refuse to repent.

They will flee to the mountains and beckon the rocks to fall upon them. They will be terribly afraid! They will finally recognize that this is judgment from God (the one who sits on the throne). They recognize this as being the wrath of the Lamb, Christ's very wrath poured out upon the world. Amazingly their hearts will be so hardened that they will refuse to repent. They would rather the rocks fall upon them and crush them than to repent before the Lord.

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The Seal Judgments have been severe. The rise of false messiahs and the antichrist with his pseudo peace, widespread world war, a devastating worldwide famine, the spread of death and disease, extreme persecution and slaughter of Christians, a great worldwide earthquake accompanied with volcanic eruptions darkening of the sun and moon, destructive meteor and asteroid showers pummeling the earth, strange atmospheric conditions, and the movement of all the earth's mountains and islands, as the earth's plates slip and slide across its surface. This will obviously result in widespread fear and panic across the world. It will truly be a time of great tribulation, but this is only the beginning.