

Session 2. The First Seal: The Antichrist's Political Aggression

I. REVIEW: THE STRUCTURE OF THE SEALS, TRUMPETS AND BOWLS

- A. The three judgment series are structured in a similar way. The first four events belong together, the next two are together, and the final one stands alone. Knowing this helps to understand them.
- B. The first four seals are distinct from the next two, which are separate from the last one. The similarities are a horse with a distinct color (white, red, black, pale). The four horses parallel the color of the horses (red, black, white, dappled) seen by Zechariah (Zech. 1:8-11; 6:1-8).
- C. The first four seals each have a rider released by a decree, which is given by a living creature and results in judgment. These judgments are the result of God lifting His restraining hand off evil men so that their lawlessness is openly manifest as they destroy one another's resources.
- D. The first four seal judgments involve natural actions occurring on earth. The fifth, sixth and seventh seals involve supernatural actions occurring in the heavens (Rev. 6:9-17).
- E. The seal judgments target the nations that align with harlot Babylon. The Antichrist conquers these nations using force, which results in a world war, economic crisis, famine and disease.
- F. The harlot religion will be destroyed by the jealousy of the ten kings who serve the Antichrist. They will burn the harlot at the time of the first seal which is when the Great Tribulation begins.
The ten horns which you saw are ten kings ...¹⁶ The ten horns ... on the Beast will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. (Rev. 17:12, 16)
- G. The voluntary harlot religion of toleration will be replaced by a mandatory Antichrist religion which will be strict and without any toleration. All who refuse to worship the Antichrist will be killed (Rev. 13:4-18). The harlot is a "forerunner" that prepares the nations for the Antichrist.
- H. The seven seals are released by Jesus the Lamb, not the Devil (Rev. 5:5; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1). The book of Revelation describes His leadership in preparing the nations to receive God's glory. The seals are gracious warnings by God to show how cruel the Antichrist and evil men are.
I saw when the Lamb [Jesus] opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." (Rev. 6:1)
- I. ***Come and see***: a voice called John to come near to God and see clearly (Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7). We receive the same twofold call to come near to see more clearly the events that are prophesied.
- J. Paul prophesied that Jesus will come after the Antichrist is revealed on the world stage.
Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [Jesus' second coming] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin [Antichrist] is revealed. (2 Thes. 2:3)

II. THE FIRST SEAL: THE ANTICHRIST

- A. The Antichrist riding a white horse is a counterfeit of Jesus riding a white horse (Rev. 19:11).
And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. (Rev. 6:2)
- B. **White Horse**: the horse speaks of speed and strength and white symbolizes righteousness. The Antichrist's reign will initially appear righteous and helpful to the nations.
- C. **Crown**: a symbol of authority over the nations. He will rise suddenly to a place of international authority. Satan and the Antichrist are both described as having crowns (Rev. 12:2; 13:1-2, 7).
- D. **Arrowless bow**: the Antichrist's authority will initially increase without any bloodshed. The arrow is an ancient symbol of war that speaks of striking one's enemies from a distance. This rider is pictured as ready to go to war with a bow in hand on a horse. However, since the bow does not have arrows, it is understood as a 'threat of war without war actually breaking out'.
- E. Initially his conquests will be peaceful by using deceptive diplomacy without bloodshed. He will *privately threaten* international leaders with war while being *seen publicly* accomplishing his agenda by peaceful means. He uses a sword which strikes up close and causes bloodshed.
- F. **Conquering**: the Antichrist will have a series of successful conquests unprecedented in history. He will initially conquer only in the political and economical arenas. It will escalate to military aggression that will result in a world war (second seal), leading to a devastating economic crisis and then worldwide famine (third seal). For 3½ years he will seem to be invincible (Rev. 13:4).
- G. **Given**: his power is given to him. The Antichrist receives his authority first from God, then from Satan (Rev. 13:2), as well as kings who will voluntarily give their authority to him (Rev. 17:17). The phrase "is given" is used 22 times in Revelation. The two witnesses, the Antichrist, angels, and demons are given authority from God (Rev. 6:11; 7:2; 8:2; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:1-18).
And he [Antichrist] was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months ... ⁷ It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation ... ¹⁵ He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast. (Rev. 13:5, 7, 15)
- H. The Antichrist does not take God by surprise. He is part of the Father's plan. It is by God's decree that the Antichrist will be given a specific sphere to operate in for 3½ years to show himself to Israel as their Messiah, as Jesus did. Jesus has all authority over all the nations. The Antichrist is God's tool of judgment on apostate Israel and on wicked nations (Zech. 11:16-17).
Jesus spoke saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." (Mt. 28:18)
There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. (Rom. 13:1)

III. WHAT THE SCRIPTURE SAYS ABOUT THE ANTICHRIST

- A. The Antichrist is the final world leader in this age. He will wage war against God. He will have the greatest political authority, the most powerful army, the most money and the largest religious network confirmed by demonic miracles of any man in history (Rev. 13). The three main passages on the Antichrist in Scripture are Daniel 11; 2 Thessalonians 2; and Revelation 13.
- B. The Antichrist will be the most cruel man that ever lived. It will be impossible to negotiate with him for mercy because he will think like a beast. He is called the “Beast” 36 times in Revelation.
- C. The Antichrist will have authority and worshipers in every nation (Rev. 13:8). However, he will not totally dominate each nation. He will be at war with some nations (Dan. 11:40-45).
- D. The False Prophet will help him to conquer (Rev. 13:11-18) along with a 10-nation confederation that will provide him with the greatest power base in history (Rev. 17:12).
- E. The Antichrist will magnify himself above the harlot Babylon religion (Dan. 11:36). He will have a total anti-God policy because he will require all to worship him at the cost of their lives.
The king ... shall magnify himself above every god ... ³⁷ He shall regard neither the God of his fathers ... nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all. (Dan. 11:36-37)
[The Antichrist] ... opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thes. 2:4)
- F. A king shall arise in the last days when transgression or sin reaches its greatest heights through the harlot Babylon. At the first seal, the Antichrist will destroy the harlot Babylon (v. 25).
In the latter time ... when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king [Antichrist] shall arise ... ²⁴ His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power [but demonic]; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty [world leaders] ... ²⁵ He shall destroy many in their prosperity [harlot Babylon]. (Dan. 8:23-25)
- G. The Antichrist will initially prosper by deceptive diplomacy that gains him peaceful conquests at the first seal. He will also use demonic signs to win influence over the nations.
Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule. (Dan. 8:25)
A vile person ... shall come in peaceably, and seize the kingdom by intrigue. (Dan. 11:21)
The coming of the lawless one [Antichrist] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders. (2 Thes. 2:9)
- H. Hitler gives us a picture of what “peaceful conquest” might look like. The Nazis took over the Rhineland (March 1936), annexed Austria (March 1938), occupied the Sudetenland or German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia (Sept. 1938), then occupied all Czechoslovakia (March 1939).

IV. EVENTS THAT COINCIDE WITH THE RELEASE OF THE FIRST SEAL

- A. God's judgment on the harlot Babylon religious network will happen at the time of the first seal.
- B. Paul prophesied of peace *immediately before* the time of sudden destruction (Great Tribulation). This is a temporary time of world peace that will suddenly end when the Great Tribulation starts. The world will assume their problems are solved by the Antichrist's skillful leadership. World peace will start at the final seven years and continues for 3½ years (1 Thes. 5:2-3; Dan. 9:27).
When they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them. (1 Thes. 5:3)
- C. The two witnesses are prophets anointed with great power for the final 3½ years (Rev. 11:3-6).
- D. Satan will be cast to the earth, then will give his throne to the Antichrist. Hell will be in many places on earth during the final 3½ years (Rev. 12:9; 13:2; 6:8).
*The great dragon [Satan] was cast out ... who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels [demons] were cast out with him ...¹² *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth ... For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath.* (Rev. 12:9, 12)
*The dragon gave him [Antichrist] his power, his throne, and great authority. (Rev. 13:2)**
- E. The Antichrist's head wound and apparent healing will be the great catalytic event that thrusts him into worldwide prominence at the first seal (Rev. 13:3, 12, 14).
- F. The abomination of desolation will occur when the Antichrist declares himself to be God by setting up his image or idol (which is the abomination) in the temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 8:13; 9:26, 27; 11:31; 12:11; Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14; 2 Thes. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:12-18).
*When you see the Abomination of Desolation ...¹⁶ *flee to the mountains.* (Mt. 24:15-16)*
- G. The image of the Beast (Antichrist) will be a statue that is demonically empowered so that it will seem to think, talk, breathe, and make laws (Rev. 13:14-16).
- H. The mark of the Beast (Antichrist) will be a public mark on people's right hand or forehead and will be used to identify the people who worship the Antichrist (Rev. 13:16-17).
- I. God will cause all the nations to gather against Jerusalem (Zech. 12:1-3; 14:2).
For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. (Zech. 14:2)

V. OTHER INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FIRST SEAL

- A. Jesus should not be seen as *both* the One who released the rider as well as being the rider. This would make Him both the One who opens the seal in heaven's court while simultaneously being in the content of it as the One who comes at the command of a living creature.

- B. Some see the first seal as symbolic of **Jesus** conquering sin on the cross, or the victory of the **gospel** through history. Others see this seal as fulfilled by the **ancient military activity** of either the Roman Empire conquering the nations or of the Parthian invasions of the Roman Empire.
1. These three views require excessive spiritualizing while ignoring the details of the text such as an arrowless bow, a single crown, the lack of the victory of the gospel throughout history over nations, and the special relationship of the first four seals to each other.
 2. There is a relationship of the first four seals to each other. Each one has an essential likeness in releasing judgment through the natural means of man's unrestrained sin.
 3. The points of identity between the first horseman and the remaining three are too clear to make an exception of one as being radically different from the other three. To see Jesus as the first horseman is out of place in the company of the other three horsemen. Jesus is not to be reduced to being in the same category. He is pictured in splendor (Rev. 1:12-18; 14:14-16; 19:11-16). He is not simply a rider on a white horse with a crown and bow.
- C. There are significant differences between the white horse riders in Revelation 6:2 and 19:11-16.
- I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. (Rev. 6:2)***
- Behold, a white horse. He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war ... ¹² on His head were many crowns ... ¹⁵ Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword ... ¹⁶ He has ... a name written: KING OF KINGS. (Rev. 19:11-16)***
1. The rider in Revelation 6 has a **single crown** (Gk. *stephanos*) of victory, whereas in Revelation 19 Jesus has **many crowns** (Gk. *diademata*), signifying His sovereignty.
 2. The rider in Revelation 6 has an **arrowless bow**, whereas in Revelation 19 Jesus has a **sword**.
 3. The rider in Revelation 6 is **nameless** and without titles, whereas when presented on the white horse, Jesus has **five names**: Faithful, True, the Name no one knows, the Word of God, and the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16).
 4. The first seal rider **does not make war**; however, Jesus does **makes war** (Rev. 19:11).
 5. Jesus comes **after** the Tribulation, whereas the first seal **initiates** the Tribulation.

- D. There are four arguments for the first seal being identified as **Jesus**. They are not convincing. First, Jesus is pictured as One who defeats His enemies with arrows (Ps. 45:3-5). Second, Jesus is seen wearing “a crown” (Rev. 14:14) instead of many crowns and is said to “conquer” (Rev. 3:21; 5:5; 17:14). Third, white is used fourteen times in Revelation for righteousness; thus, they claim that the first seal must be a righteous horseman. Fourth, to equate the victory of the first seal rider with the victory gained by Jesus in His death and resurrection, fails to understand the similar character of the four horsemen.
- E. Arguments for the first seal rider being identified as the **victorious spread of the gospel** (George Eldon Ladd) does not fit in the same group as the next three horsemen who release God’s judgment through man’s unrestrained sin with violence. This view also fails to fulfill the detail of conquering. The true gospel did *not* politically conquer the nations in the ancient Roman Empire.
- F. Arguments for the first seal rider being symbolic of the **ancient military activity** of either the Roman emperor conquering others nations or of the Parthian cavalry invasions of the Roman Empire are not convincing. The Parthians (modern-day Iran), were Rome’s most dangerous enemy. They were known for their skillful use of horses and bows. This interpretation does not correspond to the eschatological nature of the four horsemen, nor does it answer the overall context. Roman conquerors rode in progression on chariots, not white horses. Seeing this as military activity is arbitrary since military conquering has happened many times before and after the first century.