When Faith Must Endure

A Pastoral Journey Through the Revelation of St. John

Volume 4A Part 1

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A Note from the Author

This book grew out of a journey through the Epistle of James that began simply—with a desire to slow down and listen carefully to what James was saying.

Along the way, that study became something more.

In preparing When Faith Must Endure, I made extensive use of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence system developed by OpenAI, which I came to call "Atlas." Atlas served as a research, writing, and editorial partner throughout the project. Our work together included exploring the historical and literary context of Revelation, examining Greek words and phrases, developing and testing interpretations, organizing the commentary, and refining the pastoral reflections found throughout these pages.

I believe it is important to acknowledge that contribution openly.

At the same time, the theological judgments, interpretations, editorial decisions, and final form of this work are my own. I reviewed, questioned, revised, accepted, or rejected the material developed through those conversations, just as I would material gathered through other research and study resources.

Artificial intelligence did not replace the study of Scripture. It became one of the tools used in that study.

Just as importantly, our purpose was never to turn these pages into an academic exercise or to give the reader the equivalent of a graduate degree in biblical studies. There are excellent scholarly works written for that purpose, and I am grateful for them.

Our purpose here is different.

We want to help people understand Scripture.

That is one reason these pages sometimes read more like a conversation than a traditional commentary. The shorter paragraphs, pauses, repeated phrases, and occasional sentences standing alone are intentional. They

reflect the way we might talk about a passage if we were sitting together with an open Bible, stopping occasionally to say:

“Look at this.”

“Did you notice that?”

“Why would John say it that way?”

“And what might that mean for us?”

The scholarship still matters. Historical context matters. Language matters. Theology matters. Interpretive differences matter. We have tried to take all of those things seriously.

But the scholarship should serve the reader rather than become an obstacle between the reader and the text.

Perhaps the best description of the process is simply this:

There were many occasions when it felt less like a person asking questions of a computer and more like two people standing at a whiteboard, opening the Scriptures together and asking:

“What is Scripture really trying to tell us here?”

That is the experience I hope these pages provide for you as well.

Not simply reading an explanation of Scripture.

But joining the conversation.

Opening the Bible with us.

Stopping where something deserves another look.

Asking questions when something is difficult.

And occasionally sitting quietly with a truth before moving on.

Because ultimately the purpose of studying Scripture is not simply to know more about the Bible.

It is to hear what God is saying through it—

and then to ask what we will do with what we have heard.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV). Biblical terms and images are also explained in contemporary language throughout the commentary.

Dedication

To my loving wife, Marilyn,

who has always stood by me through good times and bad;

who is always seeking to know more about God and His Word;

and whose own desire to understand Scripture has encouraged me along the way.

I dedicate this book to her with love and gratitude,
and with the hope that this commentary may help her—and perhaps others as well—to better understand God's Word and to draw closer to the One who gave it to us.

About the Author

Randy Nielsen began life as a sickly child. His mother prayed that if God would allow her son to survive, she would see that he received a proper Christian education. She kept that promise, making certain that Randy was in church nearly every Sunday and, as he grew, encouraging him to remain close to God.

Later in life, Randy felt God calling him into ministry—a calling he initially resisted. But, as Randy has sometimes observed, God does not take "No" particularly well.

In 2007, Randy finally answered that call. He entered the United Methodist Church's Local Pastor licensing program and became a Licensed Local Pastor. Over the next fifteen years, he served several church appointments, sharing the Gospel, caring for congregations, and helping some of the churches he served experience renewed growth.

During his years in ministry, Randy pursued graduate theological education at Asbury Theological Seminary, completing 54 credit hours toward the 96-hour Master of Divinity degree through online study. Ultimately, he decided that the time and financial commitment required to complete the degree were no longer practical. Content to serve as a vessel for God's Word as a Licensed Local Pastor, Randy continued ministering to the churches entrusted to his care.

Randy retired from pastoral ministry in 2022, but not from his love of Scripture or his desire to understand God's Word more deeply. That continuing journey eventually became *When Faith Becomes a Way of Life: A Pastoral Journey Through the Epistle of James*. Now, that same journey has led him into the Revelation of St. John and *When Faith Must Endure: A Pastoral Journey Through the Revelation of St. John*.

Today, Randy and his family regularly attend a Southern Baptist church, where he continues his lifelong journey of faith, study, and discipleship.

Introduction

When Faith Must Endure

There are books of the Bible that tell us how to live faithfully in the ordinary rhythms of life. The Epistle of James is one of them. James speaks directly and practically. Listen before speaking. Control the tongue. Do not show favoritism. Care for those in need. Do not merely hear the Word—do it. Pray. Be patient. Resist the pull of wealth and selfish ambition. Let the faith you profess become visible in the life you live.

James teaches us what **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like. Revelation asks a different question.

What happens when living faithfully becomes costly?

What happens when following Christ brings opposition rather than approval? What happens when compromise would make life easier? What happens when evil appears powerful, injustice seems to prosper, faithful people suffer, and God appears strangely silent?

What does the Christian need to know then?

That is where the Revelation of St. John speaks with extraordinary power.

Revelation teaches us why faith that works must also become **faith that endures**.

A Book Written for the Church

Few books of the Bible have generated as much fascination, disagreement, fear, speculation, and controversy as Revelation.

Its pages contain extraordinary images: lampstands and thrones, scrolls and seals, trumpets and bowls, angels and demons, a dragon, beasts, Babylon, Armageddon, a millennium, final judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and a magnificent city in which God dwells with His people. It is understandable that Christians have wanted to know what all of these things mean.

But somewhere along the way, Revelation has too often become primarily a book about predicting what happens next.

That is not the approach of this commentary.

Revelation is not primarily a timetable. It is not a codebook for identifying today's politicians, nations, wars, technologies, or headlines. It is not intended to frighten Christians into faithfulness. And it is not a puzzle in which the person with the cleverest interpretation wins.

Revelation is **pastoral Scripture addressed to Christians who need to know how to remain faithful when appearances suggest that faithfulness is not winning.**

That distinction matters.

John writes to churches living in the real world. They know pressure, temptation, compromise, suffering, uncertainty, and fear. From their earthly vantage point, the powers surrounding them can appear overwhelming.
Revelation pulls back the curtain.
It allows the Church to see earthly reality from a heavenly perspective.
The Lamb has not lost.
God has not surrendered His throne.
Evil has not escaped His judgment.
The suffering of the faithful has not been forgotten.
And the apparent victories of the powers opposed to God are not the end of the story.
Revelation therefore does more than tell Christians something about what will happen.
It tells Christians what they must know in order to remain faithful when the world around them gives them every reason to wonder whether faithfulness is worth the cost.

The Revelation of St. John

Perhaps the most important thing we can remember as we begin is something Revelation tells us in its opening words.
This is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."
Before we encounter the dragon, the beast, Babylon, the mark, the number 666, Armageddon, or the millennium, we encounter Jesus Christ.
That order matters.
The central figure of Revelation is not Satan.
It is not the Antichrist.
It is not the beast.
It is not Babylon.
It is not Rome.
It is not any modern nation, political leader, military alliance, economic system, or technological development.
The central figure is **Jesus Christ**.
He is the faithful witness.
He is the Lamb who was slain.
He is the risen Lord.
He walks among His churches.
He alone is worthy to open the scroll.
He conquers not by becoming like the powers of this world but through His faithful witness, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ultimate victory.
And His people are called to follow Him.

If our reading of Revelation becomes so fascinated with evil that Jesus Christ moves into the background, something has gone wrong with our reading.

First, Hear Revelation as John's Churches Heard It

Revelation was written for us.

But it was not written first to us.

John addressed real Christian communities living in the first-century world. The seven churches of Asia Minor were not symbols floating somewhere in prophetic history. They were churches filled with real people facing real questions about worship, faithfulness, suffering, accommodation, economic pressure, false teaching, fear, and compromise.

Therefore, throughout this commentary we will follow a simple interpretive principle:

First understand what John showed his original hearers. Then understand what it says to the Church in every generation. Only then consider questions about fulfillment.

This does not eliminate prophecy from Revelation.

It protects prophecy from becoming detached from Scripture.

An interpretation that could have meant absolutely nothing to the Christians who first heard Revelation read aloud in their congregations deserves careful examination before we declare it to be John's intended meaning.

Their world matters.

Their struggles matter.

Their Scriptures matter.

And understanding them will often help us understand John's extraordinary visions.

The World Behind the Vision

For that reason, we will occasionally step into the world in which Revelation was first heard.

We will visit Patmos.

We will consider the cities of Asia Minor.

We will examine Roman imperial culture, emperor worship, economic pressure, social exclusion, persecution, public religion, and the difficult choices confronting Christians attempting to remain faithful to Jesus Christ within that world.

But history will never become the destination.

Historical background is useful only when it helps us hear Scripture more clearly.

Our goal is not merely to reconstruct the first century.

Our goal is to understand why Revelation spoke so powerfully to Christians living there—and why it continues to speak to Christians now.

An Old Testament World

Another principle will guide us throughout this journey.
Revelation may be the final book of the New Testament, but its imagination is saturated with the Old Testament.
Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and other portions of Scripture repeatedly stand behind John's language and imagery.
John often does not stop and tell us that he is drawing upon an earlier biblical passage.
He simply uses its language.
Readers unfamiliar with those echoes can easily encounter Revelation's imagery and search immediately for a modern equivalent.
But before asking what an image might resemble today, we should first ask: **Where have we seen this before in Scripture?**
When Scripture provides the background for John's imagery, Scripture should be our starting point for understanding it.
Revelation did not emerge from the twentieth or twenty-first century.
It emerged from the biblical story.

When Faithful Christians Disagree

We should also acknowledge something before beginning.
Christians have disagreed about Revelation for a very long time.
Faithful, serious, Bible-believing Christians have reached different conclusions concerning the seals, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, the beast, the mark of the beast, Revelation's chronology, Israel and the Church, the millennium, the timing of Christ's return, and many other questions.
We will not solve every disagreement.
Nor will we pretend they do not exist.
When substantial disagreement occurs, we will slow down.
We will examine the major interpretations.
We will ask what biblical evidence supports them.
We will consider their strengths and difficulties.
And whenever possible, we will distinguish clearly between:
What Scripture actually says and
what an interpreter concludes from what Scripture says.
Those are not always the same thing.
There will be places where we reach a conclusion.
There may be places where one interpretation appears considerably stronger than another.
And there will almost certainly be places where the most responsible answer is: **We do not know.**

There is no failure of faith in admitting that Scripture has not told us everything we would like to know.
We must never manufacture certainty merely because uncertainty makes us uncomfortable.

Revelation and the Headlines

Every generation seems tempted to believe that it is the generation that has finally discovered the key to Revelation.
Wars begin.
Governments rise and fall.
New technologies appear.
Economic systems change.
Political leaders emerge.
Natural disasters occur.
International tensions increase.
And someone inevitably opens Revelation and announces: **"There it is."**
Sometimes contemporary events may illustrate principles Revelation describes. Human empires still demand allegiance. Economic systems can still become instruments of injustice. Political power can still become idolatrous. Christians can still face pressure to compromise.
But resemblance is not proof of prophetic identification.
We will therefore resist the temptation to read the newspaper into Revelation.
Our task is not to make John's visions fit our headlines.
Our task is to allow John's visions to reshape the way Christians understand the world—including its headlines.
That is a very different undertaking.

More Than a Timeline

We will also be cautious about assuming that Revelation unfolds as a simple chronological sequence.
John's visions sometimes appear to revisit events, themes, and conflicts from different perspectives. Heavenly scenes interpret earthly ones. Images expand upon earlier images. The same struggle may be viewed from another vantage point.
Therefore, when we encounter a vision, we will not automatically ask:
"Where does this fit on the timeline?"
Sometimes the better question may be:
"What is John showing us about reality?"
Those are not necessarily the same question.
Revelation gives us glimpses behind the visible world. It shows earthly suffering from heaven's perspective. It reveals the spiritual dimensions of worship, allegiance, evil, witness, judgment, and endurance.

And sometimes the point of a vision may be less about establishing when something happens than about revealing **what it means**.

When the Chips Are Down

This brings us back to the pastoral heart of Revelation.
James teaches Christians how faith should shape ordinary life.
Revelation speaks when ordinary life becomes extraordinarily difficult.
When the chips are down, what should the Christian know?
Know that God is still on the throne.
Know that Jesus Christ is still Lord.
Know that the Lamb who was slain has overcome.
Know that evil may be powerful, but it is not eternal.
Know that suffering does not mean God has abandoned His people.
Know that faithful witness matters even when faithfulness appears unsuccessful.
Know that compromise is not victory simply because it makes life easier.
Know that death itself does not have the final word.
And know where the story is going.
Babylon falls.
Evil is defeated.
Death is destroyed.
Creation is renewed.
God dwells with His people.
And the Lamb reigns.
That is why Revelation can speak hope even while describing terrible things.
Its purpose is not to convince frightened Christians that they should become more frightened.
It is to tell frightened Christians why they can remain faithful.

How Then Should the Church Live?

That will be the question to which we continually return throughout this commentary.
Not merely:
What does this symbol mean?
Not merely:
When will this happen?
Not merely:
Which interpretation is correct?
But eventually:
How then should the Church live?
Revelation repeatedly calls God's people to worship, witness, endurance, holiness, courage, discernment, and faithfulness.
It warns against idolatry and compromise.

It exposes the seductive nature of wealth and power.
It reminds Christians that earthly empires are temporary.
It insists that God alone deserves worship.
And it calls the followers of Jesus to remain faithful to the Lamb even when following Him carries a cost.
If we finish studying Revelation knowing considerably more about prophetic systems but no more committed to following Jesus Christ, we will have missed something essential.

When Faith Must Endure

This will not be a journey in which every question receives a simple answer.
Revelation is too rich, too deeply rooted in Scripture, too filled with imagery, and too historically debated for that.
There will be moments when we stop and examine a Greek word.
There will be moments when we travel backward into Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Exodus, or Genesis.
There will be moments when we enter the first-century Roman world.
There will be moments when we consider several interpretations and acknowledge that faithful Christians understand the passage differently.
There will be moments when we simply stand before the vision and allow its grandeur to speak.
But through all twenty-two chapters, one truth must remain before us:
Jesus Christ is the center of Revelation.
And one pastoral call must continually return:
Remain faithful.
Faithful when obedience is easy.
Faithful when obedience is difficult.
Faithful when the Church is strong.
Faithful when the Church appears weak.
Faithful when we understand.
Faithful when we do not.
Faithful when victory is visible.
Faithful when victory can only be believed.
James teaches us how **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like.
Revelation calls us to become a people whose **faith must endure**.
And so, before we attempt to understand beasts, bowls, trumpets, dragons, Babylon, or the mysteries of things yet to come, we begin where John begins:
With Jesus Christ.
Because when everything else has passed away, the Lamb will still be standing.

A Word About the Imagery of Revelation

Throughout *When Faith Must Endure*, we have deliberately resisted the temptation to turn the imagery of Revelation into a catalog of modern people, nations, technologies, weapons, or current events.

That is intentional.

When John describes locusts like horses prepared for battle, creatures rising from the sea, a woman clothed with the sun, Babylon, dragons, beasts, bowls, trumpets, and seals, our first question is not:

"What does this resemble in our world?"

Our first question is:

"What was John communicating through this imagery to the people who first heard these words?"

Revelation was written nearly two thousand years before our newspapers, political boundaries, military technologies, and modern institutions existed. Yet the book was meaningful to the Christians who originally received it. They were expected to hear it, understand its central message, and respond faithfully to what they heard.

That must matter to the way we interpret it.

So, we begin where they began.

With the Scriptures they knew.

With the symbols they recognized.

With the world in which they lived.

With the pressures they faced.

And above all, with the revelation of Jesus Christ that John was giving them.

This does not make Revelation irrelevant to the modern world.

It makes Revelation **more** relevant.

Because once we understand the enduring truth communicated through the imagery, we no longer have to force the symbols into one particular generation.

Empires still demand allegiance.

Power still tempts.

Deception still misleads.

Idolatry still competes for the human heart.

Evil still destroys.

Faithfulness still costs something.

The Church is still called to endure.

And Jesus Christ is still Lord.

Those truths belonged to John's churches.

They belong to us.

And should the Lord tarry, they will belong to Christians living generations after us.

We are therefore not attempting to make John's imagery predict our world.
We are attempting to allow John's imagery to speak from **his world into ours**.
There is an important difference.
The question is not merely:
"Can we identify the locusts?"
The deeper question is:
"Can we remain faithful unto the Lamb?"
Because Revelation was never given merely to satisfy Christian curiosity about the future.
It was given to form faithful Christians in the present.
And that is why our approach throughout this journey will remain the same:
We will first seek to understand the imagery in the manner in which it was originally written—and then allow its enduring truth to speak to the world in which we live.

Of Judgment and Endurance — Before We Take You Any Further

Before we take you any further, we need to remember where we have been.
Because Revelation is about to become more difficult.
The images will become darker.
The judgments more severe.
The suffering more visible.
Seals will be broken.
Horsemen will ride.
Martyrs will cry out.
The earth will shake.
Trumpets will sound.
Kingdoms will tremble.
And if we are not careful, the dramatic images can become so overwhelming that we forget what John showed us before any of them appeared.
So before we go any further, remember:
There is a throne.
And:
The throne is occupied.

And standing near that throne is:
The Lamb.
Everything we are about to see must be interpreted in light of what we have already seen.
The throne is occupied.
The Lamb is worthy.
And:
The center has not moved.

Before the Horsemen, There Was Worship

John did not begin the judgments of Revelation by showing us:
A battlefield.
He showed us:
A throne room.
Before we saw the horsemen, we saw:
Worship.
Before we heard cries from beneath the altar, we heard:
"Holy, holy, holy."
Before the earth began shaking, heaven declared:
"Thou art worthy, O Lord."
Before Death rode upon a pale green horse, John saw:
A Lamb standing as though it had been slaughtered.
That order matters.
Revelation 4 and 5 were not simply beautiful introductory chapters before the "real action" began.
They established the theological foundation for everything that follows.
If we begin with Chapter 6, the world appears:
Out of control.
If we begin where John began, we know:
It is not.

The Scroll Is Still in the Lamb's Hands

In Chapter 5, John wept because no one could be found worthy to open the scroll.
Then he heard:
"The Lion of the tribe of Juda."
But when he looked, he saw:
A Lamb.
And the Lamb was worthy.
The scroll was placed into:
His hands.
That matters when the seals begin to break.
The horsemen do not seize the scroll.
Death does not open it.

Hades does not control it.
Kings do not possess it.
Empires do not write it.
The Lamb opens:
Every seal.
Whatever else Revelation 6–11 may mean, we must never allow its frightening images to obscure that fundamental truth.
The horsemen ride, but they do not rule.

Judgment Is Not the Absence of God

When suffering enters our lives, one of our first questions is often:
Where is God?
Revelation does not dismiss that question.
In fact, Revelation allows suffering people to ask it.
The martyrs beneath the altar cry:
"How long?"
They are not rebuked.
They are not told:
Your faith is weak.
They are not told:
Stop asking questions.
They are given:
White robes.
And they are told:
Rest a little longer.
Their question is allowed to remain:
A prayer.
That should tell us something about the kind of faith Revelation seeks to form.
Faith does not require us to pretend suffering does not hurt.
Faith does not require us to call evil good.
Faith does not require us to understand God's timing.
Sometimes faith simply cries:
"How long?"

"How Long?" Can Still Be Faith

There are questions unbelief asks because it has rejected God.
But there are also questions faith asks because it:
Trusts God.
The martyrs ask:
"How long?"
because they believe God is:
Sovereign.
Holy.

True.
Their question is not:
“Are You there?”
Their question is:
“If You are who we know You are, how long until You set this right?”
That is an entirely different question.
Sometimes the deepest expressions of faith do not sound like:
“I understand.”
Sometimes they sound like:
“I don't understand—but I am still talking to You.”
Faith does not always have the answer. Sometimes faith simply knows Who should hear the question.

God's “Not Yet” Is Not God's “Never”

The answer given to the martyrs may be one of the most difficult answers God ever gives:
“A little season.”
Not:
No.
Not:
Never.
But:
Not yet.
We prefer immediate resolution.
Immediate healing.
Immediate justice.
Immediate deliverance.
Immediate explanation.
But Revelation reminds us that God's purposes unfold according to:
God's timing.
That does not mean God is indifferent.
It means we do not see:
The whole story.
The martyrs could see how long they had already waited.
God could see:
Where history was going.
God's delay is not God's indifference.
And as the sixth seal reminds us:
God's delay is not:
God's inactivity.

Judgment Must Be Seen From Beneath the Altar

There is another reason we need to stop before going further.
The language of judgment can make us uncomfortable.

Perhaps it should.
Judgment is serious.
But we must be careful not to discuss divine judgment only from the perspective of:
Those being judged.
Revelation also takes us:
Beneath the altar.
There we encounter people who have suffered because of their faithful testimony.
Their blood has been shed.
Their lives have been taken.
And they ask God:
When will this evil be answered?
From that perspective, judgment looks different.
Judgment means:
Evil matters.
Violence matters.
Oppression matters.
Injustice matters.
The suffering of victims matters.
A God who never opposes evil would not be loving toward those whom evil destroys.
God's love and God's justice are not:
Enemies.

The Judge Is Also the Lamb

Yet Revelation will not allow us to imagine divine judgment as arbitrary cruelty.
The One associated with judgment is:
The Lamb.
The Lamb who was:
Slaughtered.
The Lamb who:
Ransomed people for God.
The Lamb who conquered through:
Sacrificial faithfulness.
The Judge bears:
Wounds.
That is essential.
God does not confront suffering from some distant place where suffering has never touched Him.
The Christian proclamation is that God entered:
Our suffering.

Our violence.
Our rejection.
Our death.
The Lamb was:
Slaughtered.
So when Revelation speaks of:
"The wrath of the Lamb,"
we must remember which Lamb:
This is.

Do Not Turn Revelation Into a Newspaper

The chapters ahead will tempt us toward another danger.
Speculation.
We will encounter:
Seals.
Trumpets.
Cosmic signs.
Numbers.
Angels.
Locusts.
A mysterious scroll.
Two witnesses.
Earthquakes.
Kingdoms.
It will be tempting to ask:
Which modern nation is this?
Which political leader is that?
Which war fulfills this?
Which technology does this symbol describe?
Which headline proves Revelation is happening now?
Christians have been asking those questions for generations.
And generations of Christians have confidently identified events in their own time as the unmistakable fulfillment of Revelation.
Many of those identifications now sit quietly in:
History books.
We should therefore approach these chapters with:
Humility.
Revelation was not given merely so Christians could become skilled at predicting:
Headlines.
It was given so Christians could become faithful at following:
Jesus.

Read Revelation With Scripture in One Hand

John's imagery does not emerge from nowhere.
It breathes the language of:
The prophets.
The Exodus.
The Psalms.
Daniel.
Ezekiel.
Isaiah.
Zechariah.
Joel.
And the rest of Israel's Scriptures.
When the sun darkens—
when stars fall—
when trumpets sound—
when plagues appear—
our first instinct should not necessarily be:
"What modern event does this describe?"
Our first instinct should be:
"Where have I heard this language before?"
Revelation speaks the language of:
Scripture.
Before trying to make Revelation explain tomorrow's newspaper, we should allow Scripture to explain:
Revelation.

Symbols Are Not Permission for Imagination Without Boundaries

Revelation is filled with symbolism.
But symbolism does not mean:
Anything goes.
A symbol has meaning because it communicates something.
Our responsibility is not to make the symbol say whatever fascinates us.
Our responsibility is to listen carefully to:
John.
Sometimes John explains his symbols.
Sometimes the Old Testament provides their background.
Sometimes the surrounding passage gives us clues.
And sometimes:
We simply do not know with certainty.
There is nothing wrong with saying:
We do not know.
Interpretive humility is not:

Weak faith.
Sometimes it is simply:
Honest faith.

Do Not Let the Horsemen Steal the Chapter From the Lamb

This may be especially important as we move through the judgments.
The horsemen are memorable.
Death is memorable.
The trumpets will be memorable.
The strange creatures will be memorable.
The catastrophes will be memorable.
But none of them is:
The center.
The Lamb is.
We must never become so fascinated with the instruments of judgment that we forget:
Who holds the scroll.
Do not let the horsemen steal the chapter from the Lamb.
And do not let the trumpets steal the story from:
The throne.

Permission Is Not Sovereignty

Throughout these visions, we will repeatedly encounter language of:
Authority being given.
Permission being granted.
Limits being imposed.
This matters.
The powers of destruction do not possess:
Unlimited authority.
They operate within:
Boundaries.
That does not make the suffering insignificant.
Limited suffering can still be:
Terrible suffering.
A fourth of the earth is still:
An enormous tragedy.
But limited authority is not:
Ultimate authority.
We learned this from the horsemen:
The rider was permitted.
The sword was given.
The throne was not surrendered.
That distinction will matter again and again.

Sovereignty Does Not Make Suffering Unreal

We must also avoid the opposite mistake.
To say:
"God is sovereign"
must never become a way of saying:
"Therefore suffering does not matter."
Revelation refuses that kind of theology.
The martyrs matter.
Their blood matters.
Their questions matter.
Their tears matter.
Their deaths matter.
God's sovereignty does not trivialize human pain.
It assures us that pain will not:
Ultimately triumph.
There is an enormous difference.
Christian hope does not say:
"This does not hurt."
Christian hope says:
"This hurt will not have the final word."

Sometimes Faith Endures All the Way Home

We encountered another difficult truth beneath the altar.
Faithfulness does not always result in:
Deliverance from suffering.
Sometimes God changes:
The circumstances.
Sometimes the circumstances remain:
Unchanged.
And sometimes faithful people die.
Revelation does not hide that reality.
Neither should we.
So we must carry forward something we have already discovered:
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not change.
And sometimes faith endures all the way home.
All three can be:
Faithfulness.

Death Rides—But Death Does Not Rule

The fourth horseman was finally given a name:
Death.
And Hades followed.
That image is intentionally terrifying.

But Revelation has already told us something about them.
Jesus said:
"I have the keys of hell and of death."
So when Death appears in Chapter 6, we already know something Death does not want us to remember:
Death does not hold:
The keys.
Christ does.
Death appears in the story.
Death does not:
Survive the story.
Death rides.
The Lamb stands.

Revelation Does Not Deny Rock Bottom

There will be moments in these chapters when things appear:
Desperate.
We have already watched the earth shake beneath humanity.
We have watched the stars fall.
We have watched the mountains move.
We have watched kings hide.
Revelation does not pretend there are no:
Dark places.
Sometimes life reaches places where almost everything we thought dependable disappears.
And sometimes it is there that we discover:
What remains.
Sometimes we do not discover what cannot be shaken until everything we thought could not be shaken begins to move.
That is not to say every tragedy is sent by God to teach us a lesson.
We should never speak so carelessly about another person's suffering.
It is simply to say:
Even in the shaking—
God remains.

The Center Has Not Moved

That may be the sentence we need most throughout Revelation 6–11.
When the earth shakes:
The center has not moved.
When the stars fall:
The center has not moved.
When Death rides:
The center has not moved.
When the martyrs ask:

“How long?”
The center has not moved.
When trumpets sound:
The center has not moved.
When kingdoms rage:
The center has not moved.
When we do not understand:
The center has not moved.
The throne remains:
Occupied.
The Lamb remains:
Worthy.

Revelation Is Teaching Us Where to Look

Perhaps this is ultimately what these chapters are doing.
Teaching us:
Where to look.
When everything around us is stable, we can easily place our confidence in:
The stability.
But when stability disappears, faith must discover something deeper.
We learned this in Chapter 4:
Faith does not always know what happens next.
Faith knows:
Where to look.
Toward:
The throne.
And now Revelation is going to test that confession.

Who Is Able to Stand?

Chapter 6 leaves us with:
A question.
“Who shall be able to stand?”
It is the perfect question for the entire section.
Because Revelation 6–11 will repeatedly ask what remains when:
Human power fails.
Human security fails.
Human wealth fails.
Human institutions fail.
Creation itself shakes.
Who stands?
And why?
We should not answer that question too quickly.
Chapter 7 deserves to speak.

John has asked:
“Who shall be able to stand?”
Now we must:
Turn the page.

The Call to Endurance

That brings us to the second half of our section's title:
Judgment and the Call to Endurance.
Judgment is not the only subject of these chapters.
Neither are:
Seals.
Trumpets.
Plagues.
Catastrophes.
The deeper pastoral concern is:
Faithfulness.
How does the Church live when the world is:
Shaking?
How do believers remain faithful when following the Lamb becomes:
Costly?
How do we worship when circumstances seem to contradict:
Everything we believe?
How do we wait when God's answer is:
“A little season”?
How do we stand when everything around us:
Falls?
That is the question Revelation places before:
The Church.
And that is the question before:
Us.

Before We Take You Any Further

So before we move deeper into these visions, remember where John has already taken us.
Back to:
The throne.
Back to:
The Lamb.
Back to:
Worship.
Back to:
The scroll.
Back to:
The declaration that the Lamb is worthy.

We will see frightening things.
We will encounter passages that are difficult to interpret.
We will encounter suffering that cannot be explained away.
We will hear judgments that make us uncomfortable.
We will encounter symbols that require humility.
And there will be moments when we may simply have to say:
We do not know.
But there are things we do know.
The throne is occupied.
The Lamb is worthy.
The scroll remains in His hands.
Death does not hold the keys.
God's "not yet" does not mean "never."
The suffering of the faithful is not forgotten.
Evil will not receive the final word.
And:
The center has not moved.
So now we can continue.
Not because everything ahead will be:
Easy.
Not because every symbol will become:
Obvious.
Not because every question will receive:
An immediate answer.
But because Revelation has already shown us where to stand when:
The ground begins to shake.
And perhaps that is the truth we need to carry with us more than any other:
Faith does not endure because nothing shakes.
Faith endures because God does not.

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The Seven Seals

Revelation 6:1–17

“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.
And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.
And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.
And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.
And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.
And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the

rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"
— Revelation 6:1–17, KJV

Introduction

The Lamb opens the scroll.
And the world begins to tremble.
For two chapters John has been standing, as it were, in the heavenly throne room.
He has seen the throne.
He has seen the twenty-four elders.
He has heard the four living creatures proclaim:
"Holy, holy, holy."
He has watched crowns fall before the Creator.
Then John saw the scroll.
And he wept because no one was found worthy to open it.
Until:
The Lamb appeared.
The Lamb who had been slaughtered.
The Lamb who stands.
The Lamb who has conquered.
The Lamb who alone is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals.
Now He does.
That order matters enormously.
Before Revelation shows us the horsemen:
It shows us the throne.
Before Revelation shows us war:
It shows us worship.
Before Revelation shows us famine:
It shows us the Lamb.
Before Revelation shows us death:
It shows us the One who has already conquered death.
And before the earth begins to shake:
Heaven has already declared who is worthy.
We must remember that because Revelation 6 contains some of the most frightening imagery in the entire book.
A white horse rides.
Then a red horse.

Then a black horse.
Then a pale green horse.
Conquest comes.
Peace disappears.
Food becomes scarce.
Death follows.
Then the scene changes.
John sees the souls of the faithful beneath the altar.
They cry:
"How long?"
Then the sixth seal opens.
The earth shakes.
The sun darkens.
The moon becomes like blood.
The stars fall.
The sky disappears.
Mountains and islands move.
And humanity—from kings to slaves—looks for somewhere to hide.
It would be easy to read Revelation 6 and conclude:
Everything is out of control.
But we have just spent two chapters learning otherwise.
The throne has not moved.
The Lamb has not disappeared.
The scroll has not fallen into the hands of evil.
In fact, the repeated sentence introducing these events tells us something we dare not overlook:
The Lamb breaks the seals.
That does not make the suffering described here simple.
It certainly does not make suffering pleasant.
And it does not answer every question Christians have asked about divine sovereignty, human violence, evil, judgment, and suffering.
But it places everything John sees within a larger reality.
The horsemen do not possess the scroll.
The Lamb does.
Death does not open the seals.
The Lamb does.
War does not determine the course of history.
The Lamb opens the scroll.
That distinction may become one of the most important pastoral truths in this entire section of Revelation.
Because there are times when life looks remarkably like Revelation 6.

Not necessarily because we can identify a particular horseman with a particular war, nation, disease, economic crisis, or headline.
We should be very cautious about doing that.
Christians throughout history have repeatedly looked at the events of their own generation and concluded:
"This must be it."
Wars have come.
Empires have risen.
Empires have fallen.
Famines have devastated nations.
Diseases have swept across continents.
Economies have collapsed.
Christians have been persecuted.
And generation after generation has discovered how tempting it is to turn Revelation into a newspaper with symbols.
But Revelation was not given merely so that Christians could identify events.
It was given so that Christians could remain faithful within them.
That is particularly important here.
The question Revelation 6 asks is not merely:
What do the horsemen mean?
Eventually the chapter asks a much deeper question:
"Who shall be able to stand?"
That question waits for us at the end of the chapter.
And Revelation will not leave it unanswered.
But before we reach it, John shows us what happens when the Lamb begins opening the seals.
The world we thought was stable begins to reveal just how fragile it really is.
Peace can disappear.
Prosperity can disappear.
Security can disappear.
Political power cannot protect us.
Wealth cannot protect us.
Social position cannot protect us.
Even mountains cannot finally provide a hiding place.
Everything human beings ordinarily trust begins to shake.
Yet one thing does not.
The throne.
And One remains worthy to hold the scroll.
The Lamb.

The Movement of the Passage

The passage moves from **seal → summons → conquest → violence → scarcity → death → martyrdom → lament → cosmic upheaval → terror → judgment → question.**

The Lamb opens the first seal.
One of the living creatures cries:
“Come and see.”
A white horse appears.
Its rider carries a bow.
A crown is given to him.
And he rides out:
“Conquering and to conquer.”
Then the second seal is opened.
Another summons:
“Come and see.”
A bright red horse appears.
Its rider is permitted:
“To take peace from the earth.”
Human beings slaughter one another.
And the rider receives:
“A great sword.”
Then the third seal opens.
Again:
“Come and see.”
A black horse appears.
Its rider carries scales.
And suddenly the imagery moves from warfare to the marketplace.
Food is measured.
Prices soar.
A day's wages purchase barely enough wheat for survival.
Scarcity has entered the vision.
Then the fourth seal opens.
The fourth creature calls:
“Come and see.”
And John sees perhaps the most disturbing horse of all.
Pale green.
Its rider is no mystery.
John gives us his name:
Death.
And following behind him:
Hades.
Authority is given to them over a fourth of the earth.

Sword.
Famine.
Pestilence.
Wild animals.
The first four seals have now formed a terrible progression.
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
Death.
But then the pattern changes.
When the fifth seal opens, no horse appears.
John looks beneath the altar.
There he sees the souls of people who have been killed:
“For the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.”
And heaven contains a prayer that suffering believers have prayed for generations:
“How long?”
How long before justice?
How long before evil is answered?
How long before innocent blood matters?
How long before God acts?
They are not rebuked for asking.
Instead, they receive white robes.
And they are told:
“Rest yet for a little season.”
That may be one of the hardest answers faith ever receives.
Not:
Never.
But:
Not yet.
Then the sixth seal opens.
And everything becomes cosmic.
The earth shakes.
The sun darkens.
The moon changes.
The stars fall.
The sky vanishes.
Mountains move.
Islands move.
Creation itself appears to convulse before the approaching judgment of God.
Then John turns from creation to humanity.

And suddenly every earthly distinction collapses.
Kings.
Magnates.
Generals.
The rich.
The powerful.
Slave.
Free.
People who ordinarily occupy completely different places in society now do exactly the same thing.
They hide.
No crown matters.
No army matters.
No bank account matters.
No title matters.
No social status matters.
No human power matters.
And they cry to the mountains:
“Fall on us.”
Why?
Not merely because the earth is shaking.
Not merely because the stars are falling.
Not merely because the sky is disappearing.
They want to hide:
“From the face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.”
There is the throne again.
The throne from Chapter 4 has not disappeared.
And there is the Lamb again.
The Lamb from Chapter 5 still holds the scroll.
Revelation has brought us from heavenly worship to earthly terror without ever changing who occupies the center.
Then comes the question:
“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”
And John leaves the question hanging.
For the moment.
Who can stand when everything else falls?
Who can stand when power fails?
Who can stand when wealth fails?
Who can stand when creation itself shakes?
Who can stand before the One seated upon the throne?
Who can stand before the Lamb?

That question will carry us directly into Chapter 7.
But before Revelation answers it, we must walk carefully through each of these seals.
Because the horsemen are not merely frightening images.
The martyrs are not merely figures beneath an altar.
The earthquake is not merely spectacular apocalyptic imagery.
Together they reveal a world in which human pretensions to control are stripped away.
And standing behind the entire vision is the truth Chapters 4 and 5 have already taught us:
The throne has not moved.
The Lamb is still worthy.
And even when the world appears to be coming apart, the scroll remains in His hands.

1. The Lamb Opens the Scroll

Chapter 6 begins:
"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals."
That sentence cannot be separated from everything John has just witnessed.
The scroll did not simply appear in the Lamb's hands.
There had been a search.
John had seen the scroll in the right hand of the One seated upon the throne.
It was:
"Written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals."
Then a mighty angel had asked the question:
"Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"
And the answer initially appeared to be:
No one.
No one in heaven.
No one on earth.
No one under the earth.
John wept.
But then one of the elders told him:
"Weep not."
Someone had conquered.
John turned expecting perhaps to see the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
Instead:
He saw a Lamb.
Standing.
As if slaughtered.
That Lamb took the scroll.

Heaven erupted in worship.
And now:
The Lamb begins to open it.
That sequence is essential to understanding everything that follows.
The events of Revelation 6 do not begin because evil has somehow seized control of history.
They begin when the Lamb breaks the seal.
John does not say:
The seal broke.
He does not say:
Someone opened the seal.
He does not say:
The forces of history finally became too powerful to contain.
He says:
The Lamb broke one of the seven seals.
The subject of the sentence matters.
The Lamb acts.
That does not remove the disturbing nature of what follows.
A horse will ride.
Then another.
Then another.
Then another.
Conquest.
Violence.
Scarcity.
Death.
But before John shows us any of those things, he tells us who opened the seal.
The Lamb.
There is something profoundly important in that order.
If Revelation 6 began with the horsemen, we might easily imagine that history had escaped God's control.
But Revelation 6 does not begin with a horse.
It begins with:
The Lamb.
The horse does not summon the Lamb.
The Lamb opens the seal that summons the horse.
And even then, notice what happens.
John hears one of the four living creatures call:
“Come and see.”
The creatures we met surrounding the throne in Chapter 4 are still present.

The throne room has not disappeared.
The worship of heaven has not ceased.
The Lamb has not surrendered the scroll.
We have simply begun to see what happens as the scroll is opened.
That is important because the imagery about to unfold can easily dominate our attention.
We can become fascinated with:
The colors of the horses.
The identities of the riders.
The bow.
The sword.
The scales.
The pale green color of death.
And Christians have spent centuries debating precisely what each of those details means.
Some of those questions are worth asking.
But there is a danger in becoming so fascinated with the horsemen that we forget who is opening the seals.
Revelation does not begin this scene by saying:
"And I saw...a white horse."
That comes next.
It begins:
"And I saw when the Lamb..."
The Lamb remains the center.
And perhaps that is exactly where the Church needs to keep its eyes.
Because when frightening things happen, our attention naturally moves toward the frightening thing.
War begins.
We watch the war.
The economy falters.
We watch the economy.
Disease spreads.
We watch the disease.
Political systems shake.
We watch the political systems.
Violence increases.
We watch the violence.
Fear has a remarkable ability to determine where we look.
Revelation repeatedly redirects our eyes.
Look at the throne.
Look at the Lamb.
Remember who holds the scroll.

This does not mean Christians should ignore suffering or pretend that terrible things are insignificant.
Revelation certainly does not.
The suffering described in this chapter is real.
People die.
People hunger.
People kill one another.
Faithful witnesses are slaughtered.
Creation itself appears to shake.
God does not ask His people to call those things good.
But neither does He allow those things to become ultimate.
They occur within a story whose scroll remains in the hands of the Lamb.
And there is another detail worth noticing.
The Lamb breaks:
One of the seven seals.
Not all seven at once.
One.
Then another.
Then another.
The vision unfolds according to an order.
There is progression.
There are boundaries.
There are limits.
That becomes increasingly important as the chapter continues.
Again and again John will use language indicating that authority is:
Given.
Permitted.
Limited.
The riders possess frightening power.
But they do not possess unlimited power.
They act within boundaries they did not establish for themselves.
That distinction does not answer every theological question raised by suffering.
Nor should we pretend that it does.
There is a mystery here that Christians have wrestled with throughout the history of the Church:
If God is sovereign, why does He permit suffering?
If Christ has conquered, why does violence continue?
If the Lamb reigns, why are His witnesses still killed?
Revelation does not answer those questions by pretending suffering is unreal.
Instead, it takes us directly into the suffering.

And then it insists:
Keep watching the Lamb.
Perhaps that is why John needed Chapters 4 and 5 before Chapter 6.
Perhaps we did too.
If we had encountered the horsemen before encountering the throne, we might have concluded that chaos rules history.
If we had encountered Death before encountering the Lamb who was slaughtered and yet stands, we might have concluded that death has the final word.
If we had encountered judgment before hearing heaven sing, we might have misunderstood the One who judges.
But now we know something before the first horse ever appears.
There is a throne.
Someone sits upon it.
There is a Lamb.
He has conquered.
He is worthy.
And the scroll is in His hands.
Only then does the first seal break.
Only then does the living creature cry:
"Come and see."
Only then does the horse begin to ride.
That gives us a principle worth carrying through everything that follows:
Never interpret the horsemen apart from the Lamb who opens the seals.
The horsemen may frighten us.
The judgments may trouble us.
The suffering may leave us asking questions for which we do not yet have answers.
Indeed, before this chapter is finished, the martyrs themselves will ask:
"How long?"
Revelation allows that question.
But it does not allow us to forget who holds the scroll while we ask it.
The Lamb does.
The Lamb who was slaughtered.
The Lamb who stands.
The Lamb who conquered.
The Lamb who is worthy.
And now:
The Lamb opens the scroll.

2. The First Seal — The White Horse

John says:

“And I saw, and behold a white horse.”
The first horseman enters the vision.
Its rider carries:
“A bow.”
And:
“A crown was given unto him.”
Then John tells us that he:
“Went forth conquering, and to conquer.”
Immediately we encounter one of those places in Revelation where Christians have disagreed over the precise meaning of the imagery.
Some have interpreted the white horse and its rider positively, sometimes associating the rider with Christ or with the victorious advance of the gospel.
Others understand the rider as conquest itself—human or imperial power riding out to dominate.
There are reasons people have reached different conclusions.
Later in Revelation, Christ Himself will appear riding a white horse.
But similarity of imagery does not necessarily mean identity.
Here the rider is one of four horsemen appearing together as the first four seals are opened.
And the movement of the four is sobering:
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
Death.
For that reason, we should be cautious about identifying this first rider too quickly with Christ.
What the text clearly tells us is enough.
The rider goes forth:
“Conquering and to conquer.”
He carries a bow.
He receives a crown.
And notice that wording:
A crown was given to him.
He does not possess authority inherently.
He receives it.
That pattern will matter throughout Revelation.
Earthly powers often behave as though their authority belongs absolutely to them.
Kings believe their kingdoms are permanent.
Empires imagine themselves invincible.

Conquerors behave as though history belongs to whoever possesses the strongest army.
Revelation sees things differently.
The rider may conquer.
But the rider does not hold the scroll.
The Lamb does.
The rider may wear a crown.
But the crown is:
Given.
That single word places a boundary around his apparent power.
The horseman rides.
But he does not reign from the throne.

3. The Second Seal — Peace Taken from the Earth

The Lamb breaks the second seal.
The second living creature calls:
“Come and see.”
And John sees:
“Another horse, red.”
This rider is permitted:
“To take peace from the earth.”
The result is terrible:
“And That They Should Kill One Another.”
And he is given:
“A great sword.”
Again the language of limitation appears.
The rider is:
Permitted.
The sword is:
Given.
War is terrible.
Violence is terrible.
Human beings killing one another is terrible.
But Revelation refuses to portray violence as an independent god possessing unlimited authority.
The rider can take peace.
He cannot take the throne.
There is also something painfully realistic about John's description.
The rider does not necessarily kill everyone himself.
Instead:
People slaughter one another.
Peace disappears, and human violence fills the space it leaves behind.
That has been one of humanity's oldest tragedies.

Nation against nation.
Kingdom against kingdom.
Neighbor against neighbor.
Brother against brother.
Human beings possess a frightening capacity to turn against one another.
Revelation does not romanticize humanity.
When peace is removed, what emerges is not always harmony.
Sometimes:
The sword.
And yet even the great sword is given.
Its power has boundaries.
The chaos has a boundary.

4. The Third Seal — The Scales and the Price of Bread

The third seal opens.
The third living creature calls:
"Come and see."
John looks.
A black horse appears.
Its rider carries:
"A pair of balances."
The image immediately shifts.
The first rider brought conquest.
The second brought violence.
Now the consequences begin reaching ordinary life.
John hears a voice saying:
"A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny."
The battlefield has entered the marketplace.
The sword has reached the dinner table.
A day's labor barely purchases enough wheat for a person to eat.
Barley—the less expensive grain—stretches the wages somewhat farther.
But either way, the picture is one of severe economic distress.
People work.
People earn.
And still there is barely enough.
That is one of war's cruel realities.
The people who suffer from conflict are not only those carrying swords.
Families suffer.
Workers suffer.
Children suffer.
The poor suffer.
Food becomes scarce.

Prices rise.
Ordinary necessities become difficult to obtain.
The scales in the rider's hand become a picture of scarcity.
Every portion matters.
Every coin matters.
Every meal matters.
And then comes the strange limitation:
“See thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”
Much has been suggested about precisely what that means.
Perhaps it reflects unequal scarcity.
Perhaps some goods remain available while necessities become painfully expensive.
Perhaps the command simply establishes another boundary upon the devastation.
We should be careful about pressing the imagery beyond what John tells us.
But one thing is clear:
Even scarcity is not unrestricted.
Again:
There is a boundary.

5. The Fourth Seal — Death and Hades

The fourth seal opens.
The fourth living creature cries:
“Come and see.”
John looks.
And this time the horse is:
“Pale.”
The Greek word evokes the sickly greenish color associated with death.
And unlike the earlier riders, this rider receives a name.
Death.
Behind him follows:
Hades.
Death rides.
The grave follows.
It is difficult to imagine a more chilling picture.
The consequences suggested by the previous riders now reach their terrible conclusion.
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
Death.
And John says:

“Power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth.”
Once again:
They were given authority.
Not unlimited authority.
Not authority over everything.
Authority over:
“A fourth.”
Even Death has a boundary.
That may be one of the most extraordinary theological statements hidden within this frightening vision.
Death appears powerful.
Death rides through history.
Death takes people we love.
Death enters every generation.
Death eventually comes to every family.
But Death is not sovereign.
Death does not sit upon the throne.
Death does not hold the scroll.
Death does not determine its own boundaries.
And Revelation has already shown us something Death cannot undo:
A Lamb who was slaughtered—
And stands.

6. Authority Was Given

By now a pattern has become difficult to miss.
The first rider receives a crown.
The second rider is permitted to take peace and is given a sword.
The fourth rider and Hades are given authority.
Again and again:
Given.
Permitted.
Limited.
That language matters.
Revelation does not deny the reality of evil.
It does not minimize suffering.
It does not tell frightened Christians:
“Nothing bad can happen to you.”
The letters to the seven churches have already made such an interpretation impossible.
Christians may suffer.
Christians may be imprisoned.
Christians may be killed.
Indeed, the next seal will show us believers who already have been.

But Revelation draws a distinction between:
Power.
And ultimate power.
The horsemen possess power.
The Lamb possesses the scroll.
The horsemen operate within history.
The Lamb determines when the seals are opened.
The horsemen are terrifying.
But none of them is God.
Perhaps this is another way of saying what we discovered before the seals ever opened:
The chaos has a boundary.

7. The Fifth Seal — Beneath the Altar

Then the pattern suddenly changes.
The Lamb breaks the fifth seal.
There is no:
"Come and see."
No horse appears.
Instead John sees:
"Under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held."
Now suffering has a face.
These are not anonymous statistics.
They are witnesses.
They suffered because they remained faithful.
The word translated "testimony" belongs deeply to Revelation.
These people spoke.
They witnessed.
They remained faithful to what they knew of God.
And it cost them their lives.
John sees them:
"Under the altar."
The imagery suggests sacrifice.
Their lives have been poured out in faithfulness.
But notice where they are.
They are not forgotten.
They are not lost somewhere beyond God's sight.
They are beneath:
The altar.
Heaven knows where they are.
God knows what happened to them.
Their deaths have not disappeared into history.

That matters enormously.
Human history forgets victims.
Names disappear.
Generations pass.
Graves become unmarked.
Stories are lost.
But Revelation presents a God before whom faithful suffering is remembered.
The world may have counted these people as defeated.
Heaven does not.

8. "How Long, O Lord?"

Then they cry:
"How long?"
There may be no more honest prayer in Revelation.
They do not ask:
"Are You sovereign?"
They call Him:
"O Lord."
They do not ask:
"Are You holy?"
They call Him:
Holy.
They do not ask:
"Are You true?"
They call Him:
True.
Their question is not whether God is trustworthy.
Their question is:
How long?
That distinction is deeply pastoral.
Faith can trust God and still ask:
How long?
How long will this illness continue?
How long will injustice continue?
How long will this grief hurt?
How long will evil seem to prosper?
How long will prayers appear unanswered?
How long before God sets things right?
Revelation does not condemn that prayer.
The martyrs cry it from beneath the altar.
Apparently:
"How long?"

can be a prayer of faith.
Sometimes faith does not say:
“I understand.”
Sometimes faith says:
“Lord, I know who You are.
But I do not understand why You have not acted yet.”

9. “Rest yet for a little season”

The answer comes.
But it may not be the answer we want.
They are each given:
“White Robes.”
And they are told:
“To rest yet for a little season.”
Not:
You were forgotten.
Not:
Your suffering did not matter.
Not:
Justice will never come.
But:
A little longer.
There is both comfort and difficulty in those words.
Comfort because history is going somewhere.
Difficulty because it has not arrived there yet.
The martyrs want justice now.
God tells them to rest.
There are times when faith lives between:
The promise.
And the fulfillment.
Between:
God will.
And:
God has.
That space can be painful.
We know God is faithful.
We know God is just.
We know God sees.
And yet:
We wait.
The white robe tells the martyrs something about how heaven sees them.
Earth may have treated them as condemned.
Heaven clothes them in white.

Earth may have considered them defeated.
Heaven receives them as faithful.
Their killers may have believed they silenced their testimony.
Yet centuries later:
John still hears their voices.

10. The Sixth Seal — Creation Shaken

Then the sixth seal opens.
And the scale of the vision expands dramatically.
John sees:
"A great earthquake."
The sun becomes:
"Black as sackcloth of hair."
The moon becomes:
"As blood."
Stars fall.
The sky vanishes:
"As a Scroll When It Is Rolled Together."
Every mountain and island is moved.
Everything that appears stable suddenly becomes unstable.
Earth.
Sun.
Moon.
Stars.
Sky.
Mountains.
Islands.
The language draws upon the great prophetic tradition of Scripture, where cosmic imagery accompanies the day of divine judgment.
John is describing more than an ordinary disturbance.
Creation itself appears to recoil.
Things human beings regard as permanent:
Move.
Things human beings regard as dependable:
Change.
Things human beings assume will always be there:
Disappear.
The vision strips away the illusion that created things can provide ultimate security.
Even the mountains move.
Even the heavens shake.
Only the Creator remains unshaken.

11. Every Human Distinction Disappears

Then John looks at humanity.
He names:
Kings.
Magnates.
Generals.
The rich.
The powerful.
Everyone.
Slave.
Free.
It is an extraordinary list.
At the beginning of the sentence, human beings appear divided by every distinction society creates.
Power.
Wealth.
Rank.
Freedom.
Authority.
By the end of the sentence:
They are all hiding.
Judgment has leveled the social hierarchy.
The king has nowhere safer to stand than the slave.
The rich person cannot purchase protection unavailable to the poor.
The general cannot command an army against God.
The powerful discover a power greater than their own.
Everything that once distinguished them has suddenly become irrelevant.
They hide:
“In the Dens and in the rocks of the mountains.”
Human beings who once commanded others now plead with rocks.
“Fall on us.”
The image is tragic.
Creation cannot save them from the Creator.

12. The Wrath of the Lamb

Then comes one of Revelation's most startling expressions:
“The wrath of the Lamb.”
Those words almost seem contradictory.
Lambs are not frightening.
Lambs do not normally inspire terror.
And this Lamb has already been presented as:
Slaughtered.
Redeeming.

Worthy.
Worshiped.
Yet now humanity fears:
“The wrath of the Lamb.”
We should not resolve that tension too quickly.
The Lamb who saves is also the Lamb before whom evil cannot remain forever unaddressed.
Grace does not mean that evil ultimately does not matter.
Love does not mean that injustice is ignored.
The martyrs beneath the altar have just asked God:
“How long?”
Their blood matters.
Their suffering matters.
Their deaths matter.
The suffering inflicted upon human beings throughout history matters.
If God simply looked upon evil forever and said:
“It does not matter,”
that would not be love.
The judgment of Revelation is difficult precisely because evil is real.
The Lamb who gave Himself for the world is also the Lamb who refuses to call evil good.
There is something else remarkable here.
The people are afraid of:
“The face of him that sitteth on the throne.”
There is our throne again.
Chapter 4 has returned.
The throne John saw surrounded by worship is the same throne humanity now fears in judgment.
God has not changed.
The difference lies in humanity's relationship to the One upon the throne.
And beside that throne stands:
The Lamb.
The Lamb who was slaughtered.
The Lamb who redeemed.
The Lamb who opened the scroll.
The Lamb whose judgment now confronts a world that cannot hide forever.

13. “Who shall be able to stand?”

The chapter ends with a question:
“Who shall be able to stand?”
That may be the most important sentence in Revelation 6.
After all the imagery—

After the horses.
After the sword.
After the scales.
After Death.
After Hades.
After the martyrs.
After the earthquake.
After the darkened sun.
After the blood-like moon.
After the falling stars.
After the disappearing sky.
After the moving mountains.
After humanity runs for shelter—
Everything comes down to:
Who can stand?
Notice what the question is not.
Who can conquer?
Who can become wealthy enough?
Who can build a powerful enough army?
Who can find the safest cave?
Who can accumulate enough influence?
Who can escape?
The question is:
Who can stand?
And Revelation does something remarkable.
It does not immediately open the seventh seal.
Chapter 7 interrupts the sequence.
Six seals have opened.
We expect number seven.
Instead:
John is shown a people.
It is as though Revelation pauses because the question must be answered before the story continues.
Who can stand?
Chapter 7 will show us.
That makes the final question of Revelation 6 not merely a cry of terror.
It becomes an invitation to keep reading.
The world asks:
“Who shall be able to stand?”
And heaven is about to answer.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when life feels as though one seal after another has opened.
One problem arrives.
Then another.
Then another.
The diagnosis comes.
Then the financial problem.
Then conflict enters the family.
Then someone dies.
Then another uncertainty appears.
And somewhere along the way we begin thinking:
How much more can happen?
Revelation 6 does not offer us a shallow answer.
It never says:
"Nothing bad will happen."
It never tells suffering people:
"If your faith were stronger, none of this would hurt."
The martyrs themselves cry:
"How long?"
Revelation allows grief.
It allows lament.
It allows bewilderment.
It allows us to acknowledge that some things happening in this world are genuinely terrible.
But it asks us to remember something when everything begins to shake.
Before the horsemen rode:
There was a throne.
Before Death appeared:
There was a Lamb who had been slaughtered and yet stood.
Before the martyrs cried:
"How long?"
God already knew where they were.
Before the mountains moved:
The throne remained.
Our faith is not built upon the promise that nothing around us will ever shake.
Our faith rests upon the One who remains when it does.
Perhaps endurance is not the ability to pretend we are unafraid.
Perhaps endurance is learning where to look when we are afraid.
Toward the throne.
Toward the Lamb.

Toward the One who still holds the scroll.

Something Worth Pondering

Revelation 6 begins with:
The Lamb.
And ends with:
A question.
"Who shall be able to stand?"
Between those two things, almost everything human beings trust is shaken.
Military power cannot stand.
Economic security cannot stand.
Political authority cannot stand.
Social status cannot stand.
Creation itself appears unable to stand unchanged.
And perhaps that is precisely why the question must be asked.
If everything I ordinarily depend upon can move:
What cannot?
Chapter 4 answered:
The throne.
Chapter 5 answered:
The Lamb.
And Chapter 6 has now shown us what happens when everything else begins to shake.
Perhaps the question:
"Who shall be able to stand?"
cannot finally be answered by discovering something stronger within ourselves.
Perhaps it can only be answered by discovering where we stand.
The martyrs stand because they belong to the Lamb.
The faithful endure because their hope is not anchored in the stability of the world around them.
The world can shake.
The throne does not.
Death can ride.
The Lamb stands.
The seals can open.
The scroll remains in His hands.
And perhaps that is the lesson we need before Chapter 7 answers the question directly:

Faith does not endure because nothing shakes.
Faith endures because God does not.

Ask Yourself This:

When circumstances around me begin to shake, what do I instinctively look toward for security?
Can I trust that God's sovereignty remains real even when I cannot understand why suffering has been permitted?
Have I allowed the frightening things happening around me to become larger in my vision than the Lamb who still holds the scroll?
When my prayer becomes:
“How long?”
Can I believe that God hears that prayer even when His answer is:
“A little season”?
And when Revelation finally asks me:
“Who shall be able to stand?”
Am I trying to stand upon things that can be shaken—
or upon the One who cannot?

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:1

“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.”
— Revelation 6:1, KJV

Everything changes.
And yet the first person John sees has not changed.
The Lamb.
Chapter 5 ended with heaven and earth worshiping the One seated upon the throne and the Lamb.
Now Chapter 6 begins:
“And I saw when the Lamb...”
That is where our attention belongs.
We know what is coming.
The horsemen.
War.
Scarcity.
Death.
Martyrdom.
Cosmic upheaval.
But John does not begin with any of them.
He begins with:
The Lamb.
And perhaps we should learn to read everything that follows from that starting point.

1. “Then I Saw”

John says:
“Then I saw...”
Revelation moves forward through what John sees and hears.
Again and again he will say:
I saw.
I heard.
I looked.
The vision unfolds before him.
John is not constructing a theory about history.
He is witnessing something.
And what he sees now grows directly out of what he has just seen.
There is continuity between Chapters 5 and 6.
The throne is still there.
The living creatures are still there.

The Lamb is still there.
The scroll is still there.
Nothing has changed hands.
Only now:
The scroll begins to open.

2. "The Lamb"

John sees:
"The Lamb."
We have already encountered Him.
The Lion who conquered appeared to John as:
"A Lamb as it had been slain."
That paradox remains.
Slaughtered.
Yet standing.
Wounded.
Yet victorious.
Sacrificed.
Yet worthy.
The Lamb is not merely another figure in the heavenly court.
He is the One heaven declared worthy:
"To take the book, and to open the seals thereof."
Now the worship of Chapter 5 becomes action in Chapter 6.
The Lamb does what heaven proclaimed Him worthy to do.
He opens the scroll.
That means we should be very careful not to allow the imagery that follows to push the Lamb to the edge of the chapter.
The horsemen are dramatic.
The Lamb is central.

3. "Opened One of the Seals"

The Lamb:
"opened one of the seals."
Here it begins.
The scroll that no one else was worthy even to open is being opened.
But only:
One seal.
There is order to what John sees.
One seal opens.
Then another.
Then another.
The events unfold progressively.
And at every stage, the initiative remains with the Lamb.
The first horseman does not break the seal.

War does not break the seal.
Death does not break the seal.
Humanity does not break the seal.
The Lamb does.
That becomes enormously important once the contents of the seals begin to frighten us.
Revelation is not showing us history escaping God's control.
It is showing us the Lamb opening the scroll.
We may not understand everything the opening of that scroll permits.
John himself will soon hear faithful martyrs asking:
"How long?"
Revelation does not pretend the mystery of suffering is simple.
But it establishes something before confronting the mystery.
The Lamb still holds the scroll.

4. "One of the Four Beasts"

Then John hears:
"One of the Four Beasts."
The KJV calls these heavenly living creatures "beasts." They are worshipers around God's throne, distinct from the hostile beasts encountered later in Revelation.
John saw them surrounding the throne in Chapter 4.
They are the creatures who never cease saying:
"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."
They are worshipers.
They belong to the throne-room vision.
And now one of those same creatures participates in the opening of the seals.
That connection matters.
We have not left the throne room behind.
The judgments of Chapter 6 are connected to the heavenly reality John has already witnessed.
The throne.
The Lamb.
The living creatures.
The scroll.
The worship.
The vision continues.

5. "As It Were the Noise of Thunder"

The living creature calls:
"As It Were the Noise of Thunder."
Revelation is a noisy book.

John hears:
Trumpets.
Thunder.
Loud voices.
Songs.
Cries.
Multitudes.
Heaven is not silent.
And thunder already has a particular association within John's vision.
In Chapter 4:
“Out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices.”
Now the summons accompanying the first seal sounds:
Like thunder.
Something significant is happening.
The quiet moment of waiting for someone worthy to open the scroll has passed.
The Lamb has taken it.
The worship has sounded.
And now:
The seal breaks.
The creature speaks.
The voice thunders.
History begins to move.

6. “Come And See.”

The living creature cries:
The KJV reads “Come and see.” The command introduces the vision that follows. Readers differ about whether the summons addresses John, the horseman, or both; the essential point remains that the vision unfolds under heaven’s authority.
A brief command.
And the first horseman appears.
There is something almost startling about the simplicity of the command.
No elaborate speech.
No explanation.
No negotiation.
Simply:
“Come and see.”
And the horse comes.
That tells us something about the relationship between the rider and the heavenly summons.
The rider does not appear independently.
He responds.

He is summoned.
Whatever power the rider possesses, he does not simply enter the vision whenever he chooses.
The seal must first be opened.
The creature must call.
Then:
The horseman rides.
That order places the frightening image about to appear within boundaries.
The horseman is powerful.
But he is not sovereign.
He rides when summoned.

7. The Lamb Before the Horse

Perhaps the most important thing about Revelation 6:1 is something we can easily overlook because we know what comes in verse 2.
We know there is a white horse waiting.
So our minds race ahead.
Who is the rider?
What does the bow mean?
What does the crown mean?
What does “conquering and to conquer” mean?
Those are legitimate questions.
But they belong to:
Verse 2.
Verse 1 asks us to look somewhere else first.
At:
The Lamb.
That may be intentional.
Before John sees the first horse:
He sees the Lamb.
Before John sees conquest:
He sees the Lamb.
Before the red horse takes peace:
The Lamb.
Before the scales measure food:
The Lamb.
Before Death rides:
The Lamb.
Before the martyrs cry:
“How long?”
The Lamb.
Before the earth shakes:

The Lamb.
Perhaps Revelation is teaching us how to see.
We naturally look first at whatever frightens us.
Revelation tells us:
Look first at Christ.
Not because the frightening thing is imaginary.
Not because suffering does not matter.
Not because Christians are supposed to pretend everything is fine.
But because fear becomes distorted when it becomes the center of our vision.
The horseman is not the center.
The Lamb is.

8. The One Who Was Slaughtered Opens History

There is something extraordinary about the identity of the One opening these seals.
It is not merely:
A king.
Not merely:
A warrior.
Not merely:
A judge.
It is:
The Lamb.
The One who opens the seals is the One who knows suffering.
The One who holds the scroll bears the marks of slaughter.
That becomes important when the seals reveal suffering on earth.
The sovereign Lord of Revelation is not distant from suffering.
Christ has entered it.
He has experienced rejection.
Violence.
Injustice.
Death.
The Lamb who opens the scroll is the Lamb who was slaughtered.
And yet:
He stands.
That means Revelation's answer to suffering is never merely an explanation.
At its center stands Someone who suffered.
And conquered.

9. The Scroll Remains in His Hands

There is another detail worth carrying with us.
The Lamb does not hand the scroll to the horseman.

The Lamb opens:
One seal.
The scroll remains His.
That image may become increasingly important as the judgments intensify.
The world may look chaotic.
But the scroll never changes hands.
War does not possess it.
Empire does not possess it.
Famine does not possess it.
Death does not possess it.
Hades does not possess it.
The Lamb does.
There will be moments ahead when everything seems to be unraveling.
When those moments come, perhaps we should remember where Revelation 6 began:
With the scroll still in the hands of the Lamb.

10. The First Sound Is a Summons

The first seal opens.
The creature cries:
"Come and see."
And we stand on the threshold of the horsemen.
But before we cross that threshold, Revelation has already established the theological framework through which we should understand them.
The Lamb acts.
The seal opens.
The creature summons.
The rider responds.
That does not explain every mystery of what follows.
But it does establish an order.
And within that order is a truth we will need repeatedly:
The horsemen ride, but they do not rule.
They can enter history.
They can bring terrible consequences.
They can frighten humanity.
But they do not occupy the throne.
And they do not hold the scroll.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when something frightening enters our lives so suddenly that it becomes all we can see.
A diagnosis.
A telephone call.

A job loss.
A financial crisis.
A broken relationship.
The death of someone we love.
Suddenly:
There is the horse.
And because it is directly in front of us, it becomes enormous.
Revelation 6:1 does something remarkably pastoral before showing us the horse.
It shows us:
The Lamb.
That does not make the horse disappear.
Verse 2 is still coming.
But it reminds us that what frightens us is never the whole picture.
There is something beyond the thing we fear.
There is a throne.
There is a Lamb.
There is a scroll.
And the scroll remains in His hands.
Faith does not require us to deny the horse.
Faith teaches us where to look before the horse arrives.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps one of the most important words in Revelation 6:1 is not:
Seal.
Thunder.
Or even:
Come.
Perhaps it is:
Lamb.
Because everything that follows must pass through what Revelation has already told us about Him.
He was slaughtered.
He stands.
He conquered.
He is worthy.
He took the scroll.
And now:
He opens it.
We do not yet know everything the opening of that scroll will reveal.
John does not either.
But before we see what happens next, we know who holds what happens next.

The Lamb.
Perhaps that is enough for the first verse.
We do not need to see the whole scroll.
We do not need to understand every seal.
We do not need to know everything tomorrow contains.
Sometimes faith begins with something much simpler:
Remember who holds the scroll.

Ask Yourself This:

When something frightening appears in my life, what captures my attention first—the thing I fear or the Lamb who remains present?
Have I allowed the events around me to convince me that history is out of control?
When I cannot understand what God is permitting, can I still trust the character of the Lamb who was slaughtered for me?
And before I look toward whatever may come next, can I begin where John begins:
By looking first toward the Lamb?

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:2

“And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.”
— Revelation 6:2, KJV

The summons has been given.
“Come and see.”
John looks.
And the first horse appears.
White.
Upon it sits a rider.
He carries a bow.
He receives a crown.
And he rides out:
“Conquering and to conquer.”
The image is powerful.
It is also one of the places where interpreters have reached very different conclusions.
Who is this rider?
Some have seen Christ.
Some have seen the advance of the gospel.
Others have seen military conquest, imperial power, or the human hunger for domination.
We should acknowledge those interpretations without pretending John explicitly identifies the rider for us.
He does not.
Unlike the fourth horseman, whose name John will plainly tell us is:
“Death,”
this rider remains unnamed.
So perhaps our safest approach is the one we have followed throughout Revelation:
Pay careful attention to what John actually shows us.
And resist the temptation to make him say more than he says.

1. “I Saw”

John says:
“I saw.”
The voice has thundered:
“Come and see.”
Now John watches the response.
He does not summon the horse.

He does not control what appears.
He witnesses.
And what he sees is immediate:
“Behold a white horse.”
The horse appears because the seal has been opened and the summons has been given.
That sequence remains important.
The rider is entering a vision already governed by what happened in verse 1.
The Lamb opened the seal.
The living creature called.
Then:
John looked.

2. “A White Horse”

The horse is:
White.
That immediately creates an interpretive difficulty.
White generally carries positive associations elsewhere in Revelation.
White garments appear repeatedly.
The faithful are clothed in white.
Later Christ Himself will appear upon a white horse.
That has led some readers to identify this first rider with Christ or with the victorious spread of the gospel.
The similarity deserves to be noticed.
But similarity does not necessarily establish identity.
This rider appears as the first member of a group of four.
And the movement of those four riders is grim:
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
Death.
That context has led many interpreters to understand the first rider not as Christ but as conquest.
We should probably leave the question where the text leaves it.
John gives us the color.
He gives us the weapon.
He gives us the crown.
He gives us the rider's activity.
But:
He does not give us his name.
Sometimes faithfulness to Scripture means knowing when to stop.

3. “He That Sat on Him Had a Bow”

The rider carries:
“A bow.”
The weapon suggests the ability to strike from a distance.
This is a rider prepared for conquest.
Interestingly, John mentions:
A bow.
But he says nothing about arrows.
That absence has sometimes generated elaborate interpretations.
Perhaps it means something.
Perhaps it does not.
John simply does not tell us.
And this is precisely where Revelation can tempt us into speculation.
We see a detail.
Then we begin constructing explanations for what John did not explain.
Better to stay with what we know.
The rider is armed.
The bow belongs naturally with the next thing John tells us:
He rides forth conquering.

4. “A Crown Was Given Unto Him”

Then comes a phrase we should not hurry past:
“A crown was given unto him.”
Not:
He seized a crown.
Not:
He created a crown for himself.
Not even:
He possessed a crown.
It was:
Given.
There is that language again.
Authority is being exercised.
But it is not ultimate authority.
The rider possesses power.
But the rider is not the source of power.
His crown is received.
That little phrase becomes a boundary around everything that follows.
The rider may conquer.
But his crown is given.
The red horse will be permitted to take peace.
Death and Hades will be given authority over a fourth of the earth.
Again and again Revelation reminds us:

These powers operate within limits.
That does not make them harmless.
Limited evil can still produce terrible suffering.
A sword does not need unlimited power to kill.
A famine does not need unlimited reach to devastate a family.
Death does not need authority over everyone at once to break someone's heart.
Limited does not mean insignificant.
But:
Limited does mean **not sovereign**.
And there is an enormous difference between the two.

5. A Crown, But Not the Throne

The rider receives:
A crown.
But we have already seen something greater than a crown.
A throne.
Revelation 4 taught us to distinguish between them.
The twenty-four elders wear crowns.
Yet they cast those crowns before the throne.
Their authority is subordinate.
Their honor is received.
Their crowns do not make them God.
The same distinction matters here.
This rider receives a crown.
But:
He does not receive the throne.
There is only one throne at the center.
That throne remains occupied.
And the Lamb who opened this seal remains beside it.
Human history is filled with people who confused crowns with thrones.
Kings.
Emperors.
Conquerors.
Dictators.
Governments.
Empires.
They possessed authority and began to imagine that authority was ultimate.
Revelation says otherwise.
A crown can be given.
A crown can disappear.
The throne remains.

6. “He Went Forth Conquering”

John tells us what the rider does.
He comes out:
“Conquering.”
Whatever else we may say about his identity, conquest lies at the center of the image.
That is why understanding the rider as some form of conquering power fits naturally within the movement of the first four seals.
Conquest rarely remains isolated.
One nation desires another nation's territory.
One ruler desires another ruler's kingdom.
One people seeks domination over another.
Then:
Peace disappears.
The sword follows.
Economic disruption follows.
Scarcity follows.
Death follows.
The sequence of the horsemen has a terrible logic to it.
The first rider conquers.
The second removes peace.
The third measures scarce food.
The fourth is named Death.
Human history has seen that sequence far too many times.
Perhaps the horsemen are frightening partly because they are not entirely unfamiliar.

7. “And to Conquer”

But John does not merely say:
“Conquering.”
He adds:
“And to conquer.”
There is momentum in the phrase.
This rider does not conquer once and stop.
Conquest seeks more conquest.
Power often desires more power.
Territory desires more territory.
Victory creates an appetite for another victory.
There is something deeply revealing about human domination here.
Conquest rarely says:
Enough.
The rider goes forth:
“Conquering and to conquer.”

Perhaps that is part of the tragedy.
Human beings often imagine that one more victory will finally produce security.
One more territory.
One more enemy defeated.
One more expansion of power.
But Revelation places another horse immediately behind this one.
Red.
And its rider takes peace from the earth.
Conquest promises victory.
Its companion is often war.

8. Is the Rider Christ?

Because Revelation 19 portrays Christ riding a white horse, we should address the question directly.
Could this rider be Christ?
Christ certainly conquers in Revelation.
Chapter 5 has just declared Him victorious.
And Revelation 19 will explicitly present Him upon a white horse.
So the association is understandable.
But there are also significant differences.
In Revelation 19, the rider is unmistakably identified.
He is called:
"Faithful and True."
He judges in righteousness.
He bears unmistakable titles.
His identity is not left uncertain.
Here:
The rider is unnamed.
He carries a bow.
A crown is given to him.
And he appears alongside riders associated with war, scarcity, and death.
For that reason, we should not simply assume that every white horse in Revelation carries the same rider.
John could have identified this rider as Christ.
He does not.
Perhaps the most responsible conclusion is therefore modest:
The rider represents conquest.
Whether John intends us to identify that conquest more specifically is less certain.
And perhaps we do not need to.
The warning remains powerful without forcing the symbol into a more precise identification than the text provides.

9. The Difference Between Conquest and the Lamb's Victory

There is another contrast worth noticing.
The rider conquers.
But Chapter 5 has already shown us another kind of conquest.
The Lamb conquered by being slaughtered.
That is an extraordinary contrast.
The horseman carries:
A bow.
The Lamb bears:
Wounds.
The horseman receives:
A crown.
The Lamb receives:
Worship.
The horseman goes out:
"To conquer."
The Lamb:
Has conquered.
One form of victory is achieved through domination.
The other through sacrificial faithfulness.
That distinction may run much deeper through Revelation than we initially realize.
The world knows how to conquer with weapons.
The Lamb conquers through faithful self-giving love.
And the Church will repeatedly be called to:
Conquer.
But the Church must learn what kind of conquest belongs to the Lamb.
Otherwise we may mistake the methods of the horseman for the victory of Christ.

10. The Horseman Still Does Not Hold the Scroll

And finally:
The rider may have a horse.
He may have a bow.
He may have a crown.
He may conquer.
He may continue conquering.
But there is one thing he does not possess.
The scroll.
The scroll remains with the Lamb.
That is the image we must carry forward.
The rider's power is visible.
The Lamb's sovereignty is greater.

The rider moves across the earth.
The Lamb remains at the center of heaven.
The rider receives a crown.
The Lamb has been declared worthy by all creation.
And so the first horseman teaches us something we will need for all the others:

Do not confuse frightening power with ultimate power.

Pastoral Reflection

Conquering power can be impressive.
Human beings have always been drawn toward strength.
The person who wins.
The nation that dominates.
The company that defeats its competitors.
The leader who appears unstoppable.
The culture around us often teaches us to admire whoever seems to be conquering.
Revelation asks us to look more carefully.
A crown does not necessarily mean righteousness.
Success does not necessarily mean divine approval.
Power does not necessarily mean sovereignty.
And victory does not necessarily look like the victory of the Lamb.
That may be especially important for Christians.
We follow Someone whose greatest victory looked, for a moment, like defeat.
A cross.
A slaughtered Lamb.
A sealed tomb.
The world might have looked at Calvary and declared:
Defeated.
Heaven declared:
Worthy.
Perhaps we should therefore be careful about allowing the world's definitions of power, success, and victory to become ours.
The horseman conquers with a bow.
The Lamb conquered by giving Himself.
Only one of them holds the scroll.

Something Worth Pondering

The rider receives a crown.
And then he rides out conquering.
From the earth, he may appear unstoppable.
But Revelation has already taken us somewhere the rider cannot see from the battlefield.

The throne room.
We have seen the larger picture.
We know:
His crown was given.
We know:
His authority is not ultimate.
We know:
The throne belongs to Another.
And we know:
The scroll is already in the Lamb's hands.
Perhaps that is one reason Revelation gives us the heavenly vision before showing us the horsemen.
Things look different when seen from the throne.
Earth says:
Look how powerful the rider is.
Heaven says:
Look who gave him the crown.
Earth says:
Look how much he has conquered.
Heaven says:
Look who holds the scroll.
Earth says:
Who can stop him?
Heaven says:
He never possessed ultimate authority in the first place.
Perhaps endurance begins when we learn to see earthly power from heaven's perspective.

Ask Yourself This:

Have I ever mistaken success, strength, or influence for evidence that someone or something must be right?
When I see powerful forces moving through the world, do I allow their apparent strength to become larger in my mind than God's sovereignty?
Do I understand victory primarily as defeating others—or through the Lamb's pattern of faithfulness, sacrifice, and obedience?

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:3

“And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.”
— Revelation 6:3, KJV

The first horseman has ridden out.
But John is given no time to linger over him.
The Lamb moves again.
Another seal breaks.
Another living creature speaks.
Another summons sounds:
“Come and see.”
There is a rhythm developing.
The Lamb opens.
The creature calls.
Something enters the vision.
And with each repetition, the tension increases.
We have already seen the white horse.
We know another horse is coming.
But verse 3 makes us wait.
For one brief moment, John hears the summons before he sees what answers it.

1. “When He Had Opened”

John begins:
“When he had opened...”
The pronoun points us back to the Lamb.
John does not need to identify Him again.
We already know who is opening the seals.
The Lamb.
That continuity matters.
The first seal was not an isolated act.
The Lamb continues opening the scroll.
And before Revelation shows us the consequences of the second seal, it again reminds us:
The Lamb acts first.
That pattern is becoming unmistakable.
Seal one:
The Lamb opens.
Seal two:
The Lamb opens.
Soon:

Seal three.
Seal four.
Seal five.
Seal six.
The events change.
The One opening the seals does not.

2. “The Second Seal”

This is:
“The second seal.”
One has become two.
The scroll is being opened progressively.
The vision is moving forward.
And perhaps there is something important in that progression.
The horsemen do not all appear simultaneously.
There is sequence.
There is order.
There is restraint.
The Lamb does not tear every seal away at once.
One seal.
Then:
Another.
Revelation presents history not as an uncontrolled explosion of chaos but as something unfolding within boundaries.
That does not make what happens next less frightening.
The second horse will be:
Bright red.
Its rider will be permitted:
“To take peace from the earth.”
But before we see that violence, verse 3 quietly reminds us that the second seal opens exactly as the first did.
The Lamb breaks it.

3. The Lamb Is Still Acting

There is a theological tension here we should not avoid.
If the Lamb opens the seals, how should we understand the suffering that follows?
That question will become increasingly difficult.
War.
Famine.
Death.
Martyrdom.
Judgment.

Revelation does not give us permission to solve the problem by removing God entirely from the picture.
Neither does it require us to say that God delights in suffering.
The Lamb opening the seals is the same Lamb who was:
Slaughtered.
That matters.
The One sovereign over the unfolding vision is not indifferent to suffering.
He has entered suffering Himself.
Revelation therefore holds together truths we sometimes find difficult to hold together:
God is sovereign.
Evil is real.
Human suffering matters.
Human beings remain responsible for what they do.
And God's purposes are not defeated by any of it.
We may not be able to reduce those truths to a simple formula.
Perhaps Revelation does not ask us to.
It asks us to keep watching.

4. “I Heard”

John says:
“I heard...”
Once again Revelation alternates between sight and sound.
John sees.
John hears.
Sometimes what he hears interprets what he sees.
Sometimes what he sees follows what he hears.
Here:
He hears first.
The second horse has not yet appeared.
There is only:
A voice.
That creates a moment of anticipation.
John heard the first living creature call:
“Come and see.”
Then he saw the white horse.
Now he hears the same summons from the second creature.
He knows something is coming.
So do we.

5. “The Second Beast”

The voice belongs to:
“The Second Beast.”

Again we are taken back to the throne room of Chapter 4.
These creatures surround the throne.
They worship God continually.
They declare:
"Holy, holy, holy."
And now the second living creature participates in the opening sequence.
That is significant.
The horsemen do not simply erupt from some independent realm of chaos.
Their appearance occurs within a vision framed by:
The throne.
The Lamb.
The living creatures.
The seals.
The heavenly court.
The second creature does not break the seal.
The Lamb does.
The creature responds to what the Lamb has done.
There is order even here.

6. Another Voice From Near the Throne

Think about where this voice originates.
John has not been transported away from the heavenly throne room.
The creature speaking is one of those surrounding the throne.
The voice summoning what comes next therefore sounds from the place where John has already seen:
Worship.
Holiness.
Majesty.
Authority.
That creates an uncomfortable but important contrast.
The next verse will reveal violence on earth.
But the summons comes from heaven.
Again, Revelation refuses to give us an easy picture in which heaven and earth operate as completely disconnected realities.
Something is unfolding.
And heaven is not unaware of it.
God is not looking down afterward and discovering that war has unexpectedly broken out.
The Lamb already holds the scroll.

7. "Come And See."

Again:
"Come and see."

The same command.
The first living creature spoke it.
Now the second does.
And again the horseman responds.
The repetition establishes a pattern:
The rider does not determine the moment of his own appearance.
He is summoned.
That distinction will become particularly important in the next verse because John will tell us the rider is:
"Power was given...to take peace from the earth."
Permitted.
The rider possesses terrifying power.
But it is not autonomous power.
The summons comes first.
Then the rider appears.

8. The Silence Before the Red Horse

Verse 3 ends before John tells us what comes.
That gives the verse a peculiar quality.
It is almost a doorway.
Behind us:
The white horse.
Before us:
The red horse.
And standing between them is one command:
"Come and see."
For a moment, we are allowed to stand with John in anticipation.
We know something will answer.
We simply have not seen it yet.
Perhaps there is something familiar about that experience.
There are moments in life when we know circumstances are changing before we know exactly what the change will bring.
The telephone rings.
The doctor says:
"We need to talk."
The employer schedules an unexpected meeting.
Someone says:
"There is something I need to tell you."
For a moment:
We know something is coming.
But we do not know what.
Sometimes uncertainty itself is frightening.
Revelation does not pretend otherwise.

But even in that moment between the summons and the appearance of the horse:
The Lamb remains present.

9. The Repetition Is Part of the Message

It would be easy to treat verse 3 merely as transitional.
The dramatic material appears in verse 4.
That is where we find:
The bright red horse.
Peace removed.
People slaughtering one another.
The great sword.
By comparison, verse 3 can seem almost empty.
But perhaps the repetition is precisely the point.
Revelation is establishing something so important that we need to see it again.
The Lamb opens.
The creature calls.
The horse responds.
Then:
The Lamb opens.
The creature calls.
The horse responds.
The pattern teaches us how to interpret what we see.
If John merely listed horse after horse, we might imagine chaos galloping freely across history.
Instead, every horse is preceded by heaven.
The horsemen appear within limits they did not establish.
They answer a summons they did not issue.

10. The Horsemen Do Not Summon One Another

This is especially important as we consider the relationship among the first four seals.
Conquest may lead to war.
War may lead to scarcity.
Scarcity may lead to death.
There is a terrible historical logic connecting them.
But Revelation does not portray the first rider as summoning the second.
The white horse does not cry:
“Come and see.”
The first rider does not call for war.
The second living creature does.
That keeps us from allowing the horsemen themselves to become the organizing center of the vision.

They are connected.
But they are not sovereign over the sequence.
The center remains elsewhere.
With:
The Lamb.

11. The Second Seal Does Not Mean the Throne Has Moved

Soon the vision will become darker.
Peace will be taken.
People will slaughter one another.
A sword will appear.
But nothing we learned in Chapters 4 and 5 has been revoked.
The throne has not moved.
The elders have not discovered that their worship was misplaced.
The Lamb has not ceased being worthy.
The scroll has not slipped from His hands.
The second seal does not undo the throne-room vision.
It unfolds within it.
That may be one of the most important principles for reading everything that follows in Revelation:
Never allow a later frightening image to erase an earlier revelation of who God is.
The horsemen do not redefine the Lamb.
The Lamb defines how we understand the horsemen.

12. Before the Sword, There Is the Lamb

Verse 4 will contain:
"A great sword."
But verse 3 contains:
The Lamb.
That order matters.
Before violence:
The Lamb.
Before slaughter:
The Lamb.
Before peace disappears:
The Lamb.
And the Lamb opening the second seal is still the Lamb John saw:
Standing as if slaughtered.
There is profound irony there.
The One who permits the vision of human violence to unfold is Himself the victim of human violence.
He knows what swords do.
He knows what hatred does.

He knows what empire does.
He knows what death does.
The Lamb does not observe suffering from a safe distance.
He bears its scars.
And He stands.

Pastoral Reflection

Sometimes the most difficult moments are not the moments when something happens.
They are the moments immediately before.
Waiting for the results.
Waiting for the telephone call.
Waiting for the answer.
Waiting to discover what comes next.
Revelation 6:3 exists in one of those moments.
The seal has opened.
The voice has spoken.
But the horse has not yet appeared.
"Come and see."
And then the verse ends.
We stand in the uncertainty.
Perhaps faith sometimes lives there.
Between:
What we know.
And what we are about to discover.
Between: The question.
And the answer.
Between: The summons.
And whatever comes around the corner.
We cannot always control what comes next.
John could not.
But he could remember who opened the seal.
So can we.
The future may be hidden from us.
The Lamb is not.

Something Worth Pondering

Verse 3 contains no horse.
No sword.
No blood.
No famine.
No death.
Only:
The Lamb opening a seal.

A living creature speaking.
And one command:
“Come and see.”
Yet everything is poised to change.
Perhaps that is why this little verse matters.
It reminds us that there are moments when we do not yet know what comes next.
And faith must endure there too.
We often want God to show us the next verse.
Tell me what is coming.
Tell me how this ends.
Tell me what I should prepare for.
Tell me whether I will be all right.
But sometimes we are living in: Verse 3.
We have heard enough to know that something is changing.
But we have not yet seen verse 4.
And perhaps in those moments God does not always give us knowledge of the next horse.
Perhaps He gives us something more fundamental:
A vision of the Lamb.
The One who opened the first seal.
The One who opens the second.
The One who will still be there when the horse appears.
Faith does not always know what comes next.
Faith knows who is already there.

Ask Yourself This:

How do I respond when I know something is changing but do not yet know what that change will bring?
Does uncertainty cause me to imagine that God has somehow lost control of what comes next?
Can I remember that the Lamb remains present not only after the crisis arrives, but also while I am waiting for it?
And when I find myself living between the summons and the answer—between verse 3 and verse 4— can I trust the One who already holds both?

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:4

“And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.”
— Revelation 6:4, KJV

The summons of verse 3 has been answered.
“Come and see.”
And now:
“There went out another horse.”
This one is not white.
It is:
“Red.”
Its rider does not come merely to conquer.
He is:
“Power was given...to take peace from the earth.”
And when peace disappears, something terrible happens.
People:
“Kill one another.”
Then the rider receives:
“A great sword.”
This is the second horseman.
And if the first horse showed us conquest, the second shows us what so often follows it.
Violence.
Conflict.
Bloodshed.
War.
But John tells the story in a way that forces us to look more deeply than simply saying:
“War happens.”
The rider is permitted.
Peace is taken.
People slaughter one another.
The sword is given.
Every phrase matters.

1. “And There Went Out Another Horse”

John says:
“And There Went Out Another Horse.”
The word:

“Another”
connects this rider with the first.
We are beginning to see that these horses belong together.
They are distinct.
But they are part of the same terrible procession.
The first rider came:
“Conquering and to conquer.”
Now another rider follows.
That sequence is painfully familiar.
Conquest does not usually produce lasting peace.
It often produces:
Resistance.
Retaliation.
Rebellion.
War.
More conquest.
More violence.
The first horse rides.
And another horse follows.
Human beings sometimes imagine that sufficient force will finally create permanent security.
Revelation presents a darker picture.
Conquest may simply clear the road for the next horse.

2. “Red”

The horse is:
“Red.”
The color is difficult to miss.
Red evokes:
Blood.
Violence.
Conflict.
Death.
John does not need to explain the symbolism at length because the rest of the verse makes the association clear.
Peace will be removed.
People will slaughter one another.
A great sword will be given.
The color fits the mission.
This is the color of a world in which human beings turn their weapons upon one another.
The first horse may have been visually impressive in white.
The second horse is frightening.

Bright red.
The color of violence has entered the vision.

3. “Power Was Given To Him That Sat Thereon”

Then John gives us one of the most important phrases in the verse:
“Power was given to him that sat thereon...”
Permitted.
That word deserves our attention.
John does not say the rider possesses unlimited authority.
He does not say the rider simply does whatever he wants.
He is:
Permitted.
Just as the first rider's crown was:
Given.
And later Death and Hades will be:
Given authority.
A pattern is forming.
The powers unleashed through the seals are real.
Their consequences are terrible.
But their authority is not absolute.
They operate within boundaries.
That distinction matters.
The rider possesses enough power to cause tremendous suffering.
But he does not possess sovereignty.
The horseman rides under permission, not upon the throne.

4. Permission Is Not Delight

Here we must be careful.
If the rider is:
“Permitted”
to take peace, does that mean God delights in war?
No.
Nothing we have seen of the Lamb allows such a conclusion.
The Lamb is the One who was slaughtered.
He knows violence from the side of the victim.
The Lamb's own victory came not through slaughtering His enemies but through giving Himself.
So we should distinguish between:
God permitting something within history.
And:
God delighting in it.
Those are not the same thing.

Scripture repeatedly wrestles with a world in which God remains sovereign while human beings still commit terrible evil for which they remain responsible.
Revelation does not solve that mystery with a philosophical formula.
It gives us a vision.
The rider is permitted.
But human beings do the slaughtering.
Both statements remain in the verse.
Perhaps we should allow them to remain together.

5. "To Take Peace From the Earth"

The rider is permitted:
"To take peace from the earth."
Notice what John says.
The rider does not initially bring something.
He removes something.
Peace.
That suggests something important about peace.
We often treat peace as though it is simply what exists when nothing else is happening.
Revelation treats peace almost as a gift whose absence reveals how precious it was.
When peace is present:
Families live.
Communities function.
People work.
Children grow.
Neighbors speak.
Fields are planted.
Markets operate.
Life continues.
Peace can become so ordinary that we barely notice it.
Until:
It disappears.
Then we discover how much depended upon it.
The red horse takes peace.
And suddenly the world changes.

6. Peace Is More Fragile Than We Imagine

Human beings often assume peace is normal and war is the interruption.
History may suggest otherwise.
Peace requires:
Restraint.
Trust.

Justice.
Patience.
Forgiveness.
Order.
Human beings willing not to destroy one another.
Remove enough of those things and violence can emerge with frightening speed.
Revelation captures that reality with one terrible phrase:
"Take peace from the earth."
Once peace is gone, the next clause almost seems inevitable.
People:
"Kill one another."
The horseman does not have to create hatred from nothing.
Humanity already possesses the capacity for violence.
Remove peace—
And what was restrained can emerge.

7. "And That They Should Kill One Another"

This may be the darkest phrase in the verse.
John does not say merely:
The rider slaughtered people.
He says:
"They should kill one another."
Human beings do it.
That preserves human responsibility within the vision.
The rider takes peace.
But:
People kill one another.
That distinction matters enormously.
We cannot blame every human atrocity upon some mysterious external force while ignoring the choices human beings make.
People pick up the weapons.
People give the orders.
People cultivate hatred.
People dehumanize their neighbors.
People decide that someone else must die.
The red horse may symbolize the terrifying reality of war.
But the slaughter itself is terribly human.

8. "One Another"

There is something especially tragic in those two words:
"One another."
Not:
Strangers from another creation.

Not:
Some other kind of being.
People kill:
One another.
Humanity turns against itself.
People created in the image of God destroy other people created in the image of God.
Neighbor kills neighbor.
Nation kills nation.
Brother kills brother.
Human violence is ultimately self-destructive because the people on both sides belong to the same human family.
The sword may divide us into:
Us.
And:
Them.
But Revelation says:
"One another."
That phrase refuses to let us forget our common humanity.

9. From Cain Forward

This tragedy is ancient.
The Bible does not travel very far beyond Eden before one brother kills another.
Cain rises against Abel.
Humanity has barely begun its life outside the garden, and already:
Blood is spilled.
The pattern continues throughout Scripture.
Wars.
Murders.
Empires.
Oppression.
Violence.
Revelation does not introduce a new human problem.
It reveals the full seriousness of an old one.
Human beings have always possessed the frightening ability to destroy one another.
The red horse gives that ancient violence a terrifying image.

10. "There Was Given Unto Him"

Then John repeats the language of limitation:
"There Was Given Unto Him..."
Again:
Given.

The rider did not forge ultimate authority for himself.
He receives what he is allowed to possess.
That parallels the first rider.
A crown:
Was given.
Now:
A sword is given.
Revelation is carefully reminding us that neither rider is ultimate.
They may carry instruments of power.
But those instruments do not make them sovereign.
The throne remains elsewhere.

11. "A Great Sword"

The rider receives:
"A great sword."
The adjective matters.
This is not a small image of conflict.
The violence is enormous.
The consequences are devastating.
Revelation does not minimize the horror.
Sometimes Christians speak about God's sovereignty in ways that unintentionally minimize human pain.
We should not.
John does not.
The rider's authority is limited.
But the sword is still:
Great.
Both things are true.
The suffering can be enormous.
And:
The suffering is not ultimate.
The sword can be great.
But the throne is greater.

12. The Sword Cannot Reach the Throne

This may be one of the truths we need to carry from this verse.
The rider has:
A great sword.
But there is somewhere that sword cannot reach.
The throne.
The sword can cut through nations.
It can destroy cities.
It can end lives.
It can create widows.

It can create orphans.
It can leave wounds that last for generations.
We should never pretend otherwise.
But the sword cannot overthrow God.
It cannot remove the Lamb.
It cannot take the scroll.
It cannot undo the resurrection.
It cannot make Death sovereign.
The sword is great.
But it is not ultimate.

13. The Lamb and the Sword

There is also a painful contrast between the rider and the One who opened the seal.
The rider carries:
A great sword.
The Lamb carries:
The marks of slaughter.
One inflicts wounds.
The Other bears them.
One takes peace.
The Other is the One through whom God's final peace will come.
One represents the terrible power of violence.
The Other conquered through sacrificial faithfulness.
Again Revelation asks us:
What kind of power do you trust?
The power that wounds?
Or:
The power that bears wounds and still stands?
The world has always understood the sword.
Revelation asks us to understand:
The Lamb.

14. When Peace Is Taken

Perhaps the most unsettling truth in this verse is how quickly humanity begins slaughtering one another once peace is removed.
That should make us cherish peace while we have it.
Peace is not weakness.
Peace is not passivity.
Peace is not something unimportant happening between wars.
Peace is a gift.
And those who follow the Lamb should never become casual about its loss.
Jesus said:

“Blessed are the peacemakers.”
Perhaps Revelation 6 helps us understand why.
We have seen what happens when peace is taken away.
The red horse rides.
People slaughter one another.
And the great sword follows.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us will never sit upon a horse carrying a great sword.
But the temptation to take peace is much closer to us than we might imagine.
Peace can disappear from:
A marriage.
A family.
A friendship.
A church.
A workplace.
A community.
Sometimes it begins with something small.
A word.
An insult.
A grievance.
A refusal to forgive.
A determination to win.
And suddenly everyone reaches for some version of a sword.
Not necessarily steel.
Sometimes:
Words.
Silence.
Gossip.
Anger.
Humiliation.
Retaliation.
The weapons change.
The instinct does not.
We hurt:
One another.
Revelation 6:4 shows us the ultimate destination of a world in which peace disappears.
Perhaps Christians should therefore become people who take peace seriously.
Not peace at any price.
Not peace that ignores injustice.

Not peace created by pretending nothing is wrong.
But the peace that comes from people who refuse to allow hatred to have the final word.
The red horse takes peace.
Followers of the Lamb should understand how precious peace is.

Something Worth Pondering

The rider receives:
A great sword.
That is impressive power.
But perhaps the most important word in the verse is not:
Great.
Perhaps it is: Given.
The sword is great.
But: It was given.
The rider is frightening.
But: He was permitted.
The violence is terrible.
But: It is not sovereign.
And behind the rider remains the One who opened the seal.
The Lamb.
The One who knows what it is to suffer beneath human violence.
The One who was slaughtered.
The One who nevertheless stands.
The sword can wound.
The sword can kill.
The sword can take peace.
But the sword cannot write the ending.
The sword may be great.
The Lamb is greater.

Ask Yourself This:

Do I recognize peace as a gift, or do I take it for granted until it is gone?
When conflict enters my life, do I instinctively become a peacemaker—or do I reach for my own version of the sword?
Have I ever justified hurting another person simply because I believed I was right?
Can I distinguish between God's permission of human violence and God's approval of it?
And when the red horse seems to dominate the horizon, can I remember:
The rider was permitted.
The sword was given.

The throne was not surrendered.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:5

“And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.”
— Revelation 6:5, KJV

The Lamb opens another seal.
The third living creature speaks:
“Come and see.”
John looks.
Another horse appears.
But this rider does not carry:
A bow.
Or:
A great sword.
He carries something far more ordinary.
“A pair of balances.”
And somehow that ordinary object may make this horseman particularly unsettling.
A sword immediately looks dangerous.
Scales do not.
Scales belong in:
Markets.
Shops.
Commerce.
Daily life.
They measure what people buy and sell.
They determine how much someone receives for what they can afford to pay.
But in the hand of this rider, the scales become an image of scarcity.
The first rider brought conquest.
The second took peace.
Now the third enters the marketplace.
The consequences of a broken world have reached:
The dinner table.

1. “When He Had Opened the Third Seal”

Once again:
“When he had opened...”
The Lamb remains the One acting.
First seal.
Second seal.

Now: Third seal.
The rhythm continues.
The horsemen change.
The Lamb does not.
That repetition is becoming increasingly important because the imagery is becoming increasingly dark.
John does not allow the darkness to change the center of the vision.
The Lamb who was worthy in Chapter 5 remains worthy in Chapter 6.
The Lamb who took the scroll still holds it.
And now:
He breaks the third seal.

2. "The Third Seal"

Three seals have now opened.
And the progression is becoming visible.
The first horseman:
Conquest.
The second:
War.
Now the third:
Scarcity.
There is a terrible logic to the sequence.
Conflict does not remain confined to the battlefield.
War disrupts:
Fields.
Trade.
Transportation.
Labor.
Markets.
Families.
Food supplies.
The sword may be carried by soldiers.
But eventually its consequences are felt by people who never held a weapon.
The third seal reminds us that the suffering caused by violence spreads outward.
Eventually:
Someone cannot afford bread.

3. "The Third Beast"

John hears:
"The Third Beast."
Again the throne room remains present.
First living creature.

Second living creature.
Now:
Third.
Each responds as the Lamb opens another seal.
The creatures who worshiped around the throne in Chapter 4 now participate in this solemn procession.
That means the vision has not wandered away from heaven.
The horsemen may ride upon the earth.
But the scene remains anchored around:
The throne.
The Lamb.
The living creatures.
The scroll.
The seals.
The center has not moved.

4. "Come And See."

For the third time:
"Come and see."
By now the word itself has become ominous.
The first time John heard it:
A white horse appeared.
The second:
A bright red horse.
Now the third creature calls:
"Come and see."
John knows what to do.
He looks.
The repetition creates almost a liturgical rhythm.
The Lamb opens.
The creature calls.
The horse appears.
Again:
The horse does not summon itself.
The rider does not determine when he enters.
He comes when called.
Even scarcity appears within the boundaries of the vision.

5. "I Beheld"

John says:
"I beheld."
And perhaps by now we can feel some of the apprehension in those words.
What will he see this time?

The first rider carried a bow.
The second received a great sword.
What weapon will the third rider carry?
John looks.
And what he sees may initially appear less frightening than either.
Scales.
No sword.
No bow.
No visible instrument of death.
Just:
Scales.
But sometimes the most devastating forces do not look dramatic.

6. “Lo a black horse;”

The horse is:
Black.
The bright red of violence gives way to darkness.
The color fits the somber nature of what follows.
Scarcity.
Hunger.
Economic distress.
The struggle to obtain enough food to survive.
There is a heaviness about the image.
The first horse rode out conquering.
The second carried the color of blood.
The third arrives under the shadow of deprivation.
And its rider holds no obvious weapon.
His instrument is measurement.

7. “He That Sat on Him Had a Pair of Balances”

The rider holds:
“A pair of balances.”
In the ancient marketplace, scales were ordinary tools of commerce.
Goods could be weighed.
Quantities measured.
Prices determined.
Under normal circumstances, there is nothing frightening about that.
But scarcity changes the meaning of measurement.
When there is abundance, people measure what they want.
When there is scarcity, people measure what they can spare.
Every portion becomes important.
Every measure matters.
Every coin matters.
The scales become the symbol of a world where there is:

Not enough.

8. When Food Must Be Measured

There is something deeply human about this image.
Hunger is not abstract.
People do not eat economic theories.
They eat:
Bread.
Grain.
Food.
When those things become scarce, suffering becomes immediate.
A family can survive without understanding why prices have risen.
But they cannot survive indefinitely without food.
That is why the third horseman reaches into a place war eventually reaches:
The kitchen.
The pantry.
The table.
The first horse may change borders.
The second may fill battlefields.
The third changes what a family can put on the table tonight.

9. The Cost of Living

And yes:
Here comes the cost of living.
Verse 6 will make that explicit.
A voice will announce the price of:
Wheat.
Barley.
Ordinary food.
A day's wages will purchase painfully little.
The language is ancient.
The experience is not.
Every generation understands what happens when the price of necessities rises faster than people's ability to pay for them.
People begin calculating.
What can we afford?
What can we postpone?
What can we do without?
How far can we stretch what we have?
What happens if tomorrow costs more than today?
Suddenly economics becomes intensely personal.
The scales in the rider's hand are not merely about markets.
They are about:

Households.

10. The Difference Between Scarcity and Greed

There is another distinction worth making.
Scarcity means there is not enough.
Greed means someone is unwilling to believe they have enough.
Those are different problems.
One arises from deprivation.
The other from desire.
But a broken world can contain both at the same time.
Some people struggle to obtain what they need.
Others accumulate far beyond what they need.
Verse 6 may even hint at troubling inequalities within the scarcity it describes.
We will deal with that when we reach it.
For now, the scales ask a simple question:
How much is available?
And when resources become scarce, that question becomes painful.

11. The Horseman Has No Sword

It is worth noticing again:
This rider does not carry a sword.
He does not need one.
Scarcity can kill without a blade.
Hunger can destroy without an army.
Economic collapse can devastate communities without a single soldier entering them.
That is one of the disturbing developments within the seals.
The consequences are spreading.
The second horseman's violence was visible.
The third horseman's suffering may happen quietly.
A person simply has:
Less.
Then:
Less again.
Until there is:
Not enough.
No battlefield is required.

12. The Scales and Human Dignity

There is something particularly painful about watching people forced to reduce life to calculations of survival.
Can I afford this?
Can the children eat?
Can we stretch this another day?

Can we buy medicine and food?
Which bill waits?
Which necessity comes first?
The scales may measure grain.
But behind every measurement stands a human life.
Revelation does not allow us to treat suffering merely as statistics.
Later John will show us multitudes.
Martyrs.
Kings.
Slaves.
Free people.
But here:
The suffering can be imagined at the level of a single meal.
Sometimes enormous human tragedies become visible in very small places.
A nearly empty table can tell the story of an entire economy.

13. From the Battlefield to the Dinner Table

The movement from the second horse to the third may be one of the most important things to notice.
War never stays on the battlefield.
Its consequences travel.
Roads become unsafe.
Trade becomes difficult.
Fields go untended.
Workers disappear.
Transportation breaks down.
Supplies become scarce.
Prices rise.
And eventually someone far removed from the original conflict asks:
Why does bread cost so much?
That is how closely connected these horsemen may be.
The first rides.
The second follows.
Then the third.
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
And we already know who waits behind them.
Death.

14. The Lamb Still Holds the Scroll

The black horse is frightening precisely because its suffering feels so ordinary.

There may be no dramatic battle.
Just:
Scales.
Measurements.
Prices.
Scarcity.
But even here we must remember where the chapter began.
The Lamb broke:
The third seal.
The black horse did not seize control of the scroll.
Scarcity does not hold history.
Economics does not sit upon the throne.
Markets are powerful.
Resources matter.
Food matters.
But none of them becomes ultimate.
The black horse rides.
The throne remains.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a particular kind of anxiety that comes when there does not seem to be enough.
Enough money.
Enough food.
Enough work.
Enough time.
Enough resources.
We begin calculating.
And recalculating.
The scales come out.
Can we afford this?
What can wait?
What must be paid first?
Where can we cut back?
Sometimes those questions are simply part of responsible living.
But sometimes they become the language of fear.
Scarcity has a way of shrinking our world until all we can see is:
What we lack.
Revelation does not mock that fear.
The black horse is real.
The scales are real.
The struggle is real.
But the black horse does not occupy the throne.

There is still a Lamb.
There is still a scroll.
There is still a God who sees human beings not as economic units but as people.
Perhaps that should shape the way Christians respond when others are struggling.
If someone's table is nearly empty, our first response should not be a lecture about economics.
Perhaps it should be:
Bread.
Compassion sometimes begins with something remarkably ordinary.

Something Worth Pondering

The second rider carried:
A great sword.
The third carries:
A pair of scales.
At first glance, the sword seems far more frightening.
But Revelation teaches us not to judge power merely by how dramatic it appears.
A sword can devastate a battlefield.
A pair of scales can reveal devastation reaching every kitchen.
And perhaps there is another lesson here.
We often notice suffering when it is spectacular.
War gets our attention.
Disaster gets our attention.
Violence gets our attention.
But some suffering happens quietly.
Someone skips a meal.
Someone chooses between necessities.
Someone stretches what little remains.
Someone looks at the price and quietly puts something back.
No thunder.
No sword.
No battlefield.
Just:
Scales.
Perhaps followers of the Lamb should learn to notice that kind of suffering too.
Because sometimes the greatest compassion begins when we see what everyone else has learned to overlook.

Ask Yourself This:

Do I recognize how quickly the consequences of conflict can reach people who had nothing to do with creating it?
When I have enough, do I notice those around me who may quietly be struggling with scarcity?
Has fear of not having enough ever caused me to hold too tightly to what I have?
When I see another person's need, am I more inclined to explain it—or to help meet it?
And when I find myself staring anxiously at the scales, can I remember:
The black horse may measure what is scarce.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:6

“And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”
— Revelation 6:6, KJV

The scales now make sense.
John heard the third living creature call:
“Come and see.”
He looked.
A black horse appeared.
Its rider held:
“A pair of balances.”
Now a voice announces the prices.
And they are devastating.
A day's labor will purchase only a small amount of wheat.
Barley will stretch the wages somewhat farther.
But either way, the picture is clear:
Food has become painfully expensive.
A person can work all day simply to obtain enough food to make it through another day.
There is little margin.
Little security.
Little room for anything to go wrong.
The black horse has entered the marketplace.
And ordinary people feel the consequences.

1. “I Heard”

Again John says:
“I heard.”
The scales were something he saw.
The prices are something he hears.
Revelation often works this way.
The vision appears.
Then a voice helps us understand what we are seeing.
The scales are not merely symbolic objects held by a mysterious rider.
They are connected with:
Food.
Wages.
Prices.
Scarcity.
The image becomes painfully practical.

John is no longer simply watching a horse.
He is hearing what dinner costs.

2. “A Voice”

John says:
“A Voice...”
He hears it.
But he does not identify the speaker.
That is worth respecting.
We might like to know exactly who speaks.
John does not tell us.
And once again we encounter one of the disciplines required when reading Revelation:
We should not claim more certainty than the text provides.
The identity of the voice may be uncertain.
Its message is not.
The voice announces the economic conditions accompanying the third horseman.
And those conditions are severe.

3. “In the Midst of the Four Beasts”

The voice comes:
“In the Midst of the Four Beasts.”
That location immediately draws our attention back toward:
The throne.
The four living creatures surround the throne.
The Lamb has opened the third seal.
The third creature has called:
“Come and see.”
And now a voice is heard from their midst.
Once again the suffering described upon the earth is not occurring outside God's awareness.
Heaven sees.
Heaven knows.
The price of bread has not escaped heaven's notice.
That may sound like a small thing after the grandeur of Chapters 4 and 5.
But perhaps it is not small at all.
The God worshiped by all creation knows what ordinary people are paying for food.

4. “A Measure of Wheat”

The voice announces:
“A measure of wheat...”
The KJV’s “measure” represents a small daily ration of grain, roughly enough to sustain one person for a day.

And the price?
“A penny.”
Think about that.
Work all day.
Earn your wages.
Spend all of them.
And receive enough wheat for:
Today.
Nothing for tomorrow.
Nothing for clothing.
Nothing for shelter.
Nothing for other necessities.
Nothing for your family.
Just enough grain for one person.
For one day.
This is not ordinary inflation.
This is a picture of extreme economic distress.
The scales of verse 5 have become scales of survival.

5. “For a Penny”

The KJV’s “penny” is the denarius, a coin associated with a laborer’s daily wage. The image becomes painfully personal.
“A penny.”
The person is working.
That is important.
This is not someone refusing to work.
This is someone who works an entire day and still barely obtains enough.
The problem is not absence of effort.
The problem is that wages can no longer keep pace with the cost of necessities.
That experience has echoed through countless periods of human history.
People can work faithfully.
Work hard.
Do everything expected of them.
And still struggle.
Revelation does not portray every experience of poverty as the result of personal irresponsibility.
Sometimes:
The economy itself is broken.
Sometimes the scales have become cruel.

6. Working Today to Eat Today

There is almost no margin in this picture.
Work today.

Eat today.
Then:
Start again tomorrow.
That kind of existence produces its own form of bondage.
There is no ability to prepare for the future because everything earned is consumed by the present.
No reserve.
No cushion.
No security.
One interruption could become catastrophic.
Illness.
Lost work.
Another increase in price.
Another shortage.
Anything could push the household beyond what it can bear.
That is what scarcity does.
It turns ordinary life into a constant calculation.

7. "Three Measures of Barley"

There is another option.
"Three measures of barley for a penny."
Barley was generally less desirable than wheat but could feed more people for the same money.
And suddenly we can imagine the calculation taking place.
Wheat?
Or:
Barley?
Quality?
Or:
Quantity?
Feed one person better?
Or:
Feed several people something?
This is what poverty does.
It forces choices people with abundance rarely have to consider.
Not:
What would I like?
But:
What can I afford?
Not:
What is best?
But:
What will stretch farthest?

Not:
What do we want for dinner?
But:
How many people must this feed?
The black horse turns meals into mathematics.

8. The Family Behind the Price

It is easy to read:
“A measure of wheat for a penny”
as an ancient economic statistic.
But there are people behind the numbers.
Imagine someone finishing a day's work.
The wages are in his hand.
He goes to the market.
He looks at the price.
Then he thinks about the people waiting at home.
Suddenly the question is not:
What does wheat cost?
The question is:
How do I feed my family?
That is where Revelation's imagery becomes deeply human.
The scales are not merely measuring grain.
They are measuring the painful choices forced upon ordinary people.

9. Scarcity Does Not Fall Equally

Then comes the puzzling final command:
“And see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”
Something is protected.
Wheat and barley have become painfully expensive.
Yet:
Oil and wine remain.
Exactly why John gives us this distinction has been debated.
Perhaps the crops respond differently to the conditions envisioned.
Perhaps the statement emphasizes that the scarcity is severe but limited.
Perhaps it also suggests an uncomfortable inequality in which basic staples become difficult to obtain while other goods remain available.
We should be careful not to force one explanation where the text does not give us one.
But the contrast itself is unmistakable.
Some things are devastated.
Others are not.
Scarcity exists.
But it has:
A boundary.

10. “Hurt Not”

Those words may be more important than we first realize.
“Hurt not...”
There is a limit.
The black horse does not receive unrestricted authority.
Just as:
A crown was given to the first rider.
The second rider was permitted to take peace.
A great sword was given to him.
Now the effects associated with the third horse are restrained:
“See thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”
Once again:
The chaos has a boundary.
The suffering is real.
The scarcity is severe.
But the black horse does not possess unlimited authority.

11. Severe Does Not Mean Sovereign

That distinction may be one of the most important lessons of the seals.
Something can be:
Terrible.
Without being:
Ultimate.
Something can be:
Devastating.
Without being:
Sovereign.
Something can profoundly affect our lives without becoming lord over them.
The black horse creates genuine suffering.
A day's wages for a day's food is terrible.
But the rider does not determine his own limits.
There remains a:
“Hurt not.”
The horseman must stop somewhere.

12. Oil and Wine

Olive oil and wine were familiar parts of life in the ancient Mediterranean world.
They were not simply modern luxury items.
Oil had many uses.
Wine was a common part of daily life.
That makes the command more complicated than simply saying:

“The poor cannot afford bread while the rich men continue buying luxuries.”
There may be an element of economic disparity in the image, but the text itself does not explicitly explain the distinction that way.
So again:
We should resist claiming more than John gives us.
What we can say is this:
The devastation is selective.
The grain supply is under extraordinary pressure.
The oil and wine are specifically protected.
The judgment is therefore:
Severe.
But not total.

13. The Cost of Living Becomes the Cost of Surviving

Normally we speak about:
The cost of living.
But Revelation 6:6 describes something closer to:
The cost of surviving.
A day's labor.
A day's food.
Repeat.
There is little room for anything else.
And that is what makes the verse so disturbing.
The third horseman does not need dramatic violence.
He simply makes ordinary necessities nearly unaffordable.
The suffering happens quietly.
No sword needs to fall.
No blood needs to spill.
Someone simply cannot afford enough.

14. God Notices the Grocery Bill

There is something almost surprisingly pastoral hidden within this frightening verse.
The throne room of heaven is concerned with:
The price of wheat.
Think about that.
We have seen:
Lightning.
Thunder.
A rainbow like emerald.
Twenty-four elders.
Four living creatures.
Myriads of angels.

The Lamb.
The scroll.
The worship of all creation.
And now Revelation talks about:
Groceries.
That tells us something about God.
The God of cosmic worship is not too great to notice ordinary human need.
The One seated upon the throne knows that someone worked all day and can barely afford bread.
Heaven is not concerned only with:
Empires.
Kings.
Wars.
Great movements of history.
Heaven notices:
The table.

15. "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

It is difficult to read this verse without hearing another familiar prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread."
Normally we may pray those words rather quickly.
For someone living under the conditions of Revelation 6:6, they would carry enormous weight.
Daily bread would mean:
Daily bread.
Enough for today.
Tomorrow will require another prayer.
Perhaps abundance can make us forget how radical that prayer really is.
Jesus taught His disciples to depend upon God for something as ordinary and necessary as food.
Revelation reminds us what life looks like when obtaining that food becomes difficult.
Daily bread is never merely:
Bread.
It is:
Grace.

16. The Church and the Empty Table

If God notices the price of bread, perhaps His people should notice too.
Christians cannot read a verse like this only as a puzzle about future prophecy.
There are people in every generation who understand these scales.
People who work and still struggle.

People who quietly choose between necessities.
People whose children eat first.
People who know exactly how far a dollar must stretch.
People who stand in a store doing arithmetic in their heads.
If Revelation makes us fascinated with the black horse but indifferent to the hungry person, we have probably missed something important.
The Lamb who opens the seal is also the One who taught His followers to feed the hungry.
Prophecy should never make us less compassionate.
If we understand it rightly:
It should make us more.

17. The Voice Still Comes From Heaven

The verse began with a voice.
And perhaps we should end there.
The prices are announced from:
"In the Midst of the Four Beasts."
The black horse rides on earth.
But heaven knows the price of wheat.
The scales are in the rider's hand.
But the scroll remains in the Lamb's.
The food may be scarce.
But God's awareness is not.
The household may feel forgotten.
It is not.
The black horse may determine what appears on the scales.
It does not determine who sits upon the throne.

Pastoral Reflection

There are few things more unsettling than realizing that the numbers no longer work.
Income.
Expenses.
Food.
Medicine.
Housing.
Utilities.
Something has to give.
And sometimes there simply is not much left to give.
People who have never experienced that kind of financial pressure can easily reduce it to mathematics.
But for the person living it:
It is emotional.
It is exhausting.

It is frightening.
It follows you to bed.
It wakes up with you.
And Revelation does something remarkable.
It tells us:
Heaven notices.
God sees the person standing before the scales.
God sees the worker whose wages no longer seem sufficient.
God sees the parent calculating how to make what remains stretch farther.
And perhaps God expects His Church to see them too.
Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do for someone is not explain why the black horse rides.
Sometimes:
We help buy the bread.

Something Worth Pondering

The black horse carries scales.
And the scales announce:
Not enough.
But heaven places a boundary around the scarcity:
"See thou hurt not the oil and the wine."
There is still a:
"Hurt not."
There is still a limit.
There is still Someone whose authority reaches farther than the horseman's.
That does not mean the suffering is imaginary.
A day's work for a day's food is still terrible.
But perhaps Revelation wants us to learn something we will need when scarcity enters our own lives.
Scarcity says:
There will never be enough.
Fear says:
You are alone.
The scales say:
Look how little remains.
But heaven says:
The horse has limits.
And faith remembers:
The scales may tell me what I have.
They cannot tell me who holds me.

Ask Yourself This:

When I have enough, do I remember those who are quietly struggling to afford what they need?
Have I ever assumed that someone's financial hardship must be the result of personal failure when circumstances may be far more complicated?
When resources become tight, does fear make me less generous—or more aware of how precious generosity can be?
Do I believe that God is concerned not only with the great spiritual questions of my life but also with ordinary needs like food, work, and provision?
And when the numbers do not seem to work—
when the scales seem to say:
"Not enough"—
can I still pray with trust:
"Give us this day our daily bread"?

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:7

“And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.”
— Revelation 6:7, KJV

The Lamb acts again.
The fourth seal breaks.
The fourth living creature speaks.
And for the fourth time, the command sounds:
“Come and see.”
By now we know what follows that word.
The first summons brought the white horse.
The second brought the bright red horse.
The third brought the black horse.
Now:
The fourth creature speaks.
And there is something ominous about the repetition.
We know another horse is coming.
But verse 7 does not show it to us yet.
Once again Revelation leaves us standing for a moment between:
The summons.
And the answer.
But this time we have traveled far enough to recognize the progression.
Conquest.
Violence.
Scarcity.
What comes after those?
Verse 8 will give the rider a name.
Death.

1. “When He Had Opened”

Again:
“When he had opened...”
The subject remains:
The Lamb.
Four seals.
One Lamb.
The imagery has grown darker with every opening.
But John never changes the One opening them.
That consistency is important.
The white horse did not take the scroll from Him.
The red horse did not drive Him from the throne.

The black horse did not place heaven under scarcity.
The Lamb remains where Revelation has placed Him.
Standing.
Worthy.
Holding the scroll.
Opening the seals.
Before Death appears in verse 8, Revelation once again directs our attention toward:
The Lamb.

2. "The Fourth Seal"

We have reached:
"The fourth seal."
This completes the first group within the seven seals.
The first four belong together because each summons a horse and rider.
After this, the pattern will change.
The fifth seal will reveal the souls beneath the altar.
The sixth will bring cosmic upheaval.
Then Chapter 7 will interrupt the sequence before the seventh seal opens.
But for now:
One horse remains.
And there is a terrible logic to where we have arrived.
Conquest can lead to:
War.
War can lead to:
Scarcity.
Scarcity can lead to:
Death.
The fourth horse is not an unexpected visitor.
He has been following the others all along.

3. The Progression Has a Destination

Perhaps that is one of the sobering lessons of these first four seals.
Human choices have consequences.
Conquest does not remain conquest.
Violence does not remain on the battlefield.
Scarcity does not remain an economic statistic.
Eventually:
People die.
The horsemen form almost a chain of consequences.
Power seeks domination.
Domination produces conflict.
Conflict disrupts ordinary life.
Scarcity follows.

And eventually:
Death.
That does not mean every war or famine follows precisely the same sequence.
Revelation is giving us a vision, not an economic or military textbook.
But the pattern is painfully recognizable.
Brokenness spreads.
Sin has consequences.
Violence produces more than the moment of violence itself.
One horse makes room for another.

4. "I Heard"

John says:
"I heard."
Again:
Before he sees, he hears.
There is a voice before there is a horse.
That order has been consistent.
And perhaps by the fourth seal the voice itself carries a kind of dread.
John knows what:
"Come and see."
has meant three times already.
Sometimes repetition changes the way we hear a word.
The first time:
We are curious.
The second:
We recognize it.
The third:
We anticipate.
The fourth:
We may almost dread what comes next.
John hears.
And waits.

5. "The Voice of the Fourth Beast"

This time John specifically says:
"The Voice of the Fourth Beast."
Now all four have spoken.
The four creatures surrounding the throne have each issued one summons.
One creature.
One horse.
Four times.
There is order.

There is sequence.
There is symmetry.
This is not chaos stumbling into the vision.
Even the arrival of the horsemen follows structure.
That may seem like a small observation.
But in a chapter filled with frightening imagery, structure itself communicates something.
The events are not random.
The horsemen do not trample through heaven and seize control.
Each waits.
Each is summoned.
Each comes only after the Lamb opens a seal.

6. The Worshipers and the Horsemen

There is a striking contrast here.
These are the same living creatures we encountered in Chapter 4.
Their characteristic activity was worship.
Day and night they declared:
"Holy, holy, holy."
Now those same creatures call:
"Come and see."
Worship and judgment exist surprisingly close together in Revelation.
That may make us uncomfortable.
But perhaps Revelation is teaching us that God's holiness cannot ultimately be separated from His response to evil.
The God worshiped as holy is not indifferent to what destroys His creation.
The martyrs beneath the altar will soon ask precisely for that reason:
"How long?"
They expect the holy God to act.
A God who never cares about injustice would hardly be worthy of their cry.

7. "Come And See."

For the fourth time:
"Come and see."
A brief command.
No argument.
No negotiation.
No explanation.
The creature calls.
The horse responds.
And again the command reminds us:
The horseman is summoned.

Death will appear in the next verse.
But even Death does not simply ride whenever it pleases.
That is extraordinarily important.
Death often feels sovereign from our side of existence.
It seems to arrive without permission.
It interrupts plans.
It ends conversations.
It separates people who love one another.
It seems terribly final.
But Revelation places even Death on the receiving end of:
"Come and see."
Death does not issue the command.
Death answers it.

8. Before Death, the Lamb

We know verse 8.
We know what is coming.
A pale green horse.
A rider named:
Death.
Hades following behind.
But Revelation gives us verse 7 first.
And verse 7 says:
The Lamb broke the seal.
Perhaps that order deserves to be written deeply into our understanding of this chapter.
Before Death:
The Lamb.
And what do we already know about this Lamb?
He was slaughtered.
He died.
And yet:
He stands.
That means Death is about to enter a vision in which Death has already been defeated in principle.
The fourth rider may be named Death.
But the One opening the seal is the One Death could not hold.
That changes everything.

9. Death Is Coming Into the Resurrection's Story

If we had begun Revelation with the pale horse, Death might appear ultimate.
But we did not.
We began with:

Jesus Christ.
“The first begotten of the dead.”
Then John saw:
The Son of Man.
The One who declared:
“I was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.”
And He holds:
“The keys of hell and of death.”
Then Chapter 5 showed us:
The slaughtered Lamb standing.
Only after all of that does Revelation show us Death riding a horse.
John has prepared us.
Death is real.
Death is terrible.
But Death has already been placed within a larger story.
The story of:
Resurrection.

10. “Come And See.” Is Not Death's Final Word

The fourth living creature says:
“Come and see.”
Death will answer.
But Revelation will eventually speak another command.
At the end of the book:
Death and Hades themselves will be thrown into the lake of fire.
The rider who appears powerful in Chapter 6 will not ride forever.
That ending is still far ahead.
John has much more to show us.
But we already know enough to recognize:
Death's appearance is not Death's victory.
Death enters the vision.
Death does not write the ending.

11. Sometimes Things Get Bleak

By the fourth seal, things have become bleak.
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
Now:
Death.
There is no point pretending otherwise.
Revelation does not hurry us past the darkness.
It makes us look at it.

Perhaps because faith that endures must be capable of looking honestly at what is painful without surrendering to despair.
There is a difference between:
Hope.
And denial.
Denial says:
Nothing is wrong.
Hope says:
Something is terribly wrong—
but it will not have the final word.
Revelation gives us the second.

12. Rock Bottom Is Not the End of the Story

Sometimes life seems to descend through its own series of seals.
One thing happens.
Then another.
Then another.
We think:
Surely this is as bad as it can get.
And then:
Another horse.
There are moments when people reach what we sometimes call:
Rock bottom.
The place where everything we depended upon seems to have disappeared.
Revelation understands that place.
But it refuses to identify rock bottom with the end.
Even when Death rides:
The Lamb stands.
That may be one of the simplest and most important contrasts in the chapter.
Death rides.
The Lamb stands.
One is moving through history.
The Other is Lord of history.

13. The Fourth Summons Completes the Circle

All four living creatures have now spoken.
All four horsemen will have been summoned.
And after verse 8:
No more horses.
The vision will move elsewhere.
That means the horsemen have a beginning.
They have a sequence.

And they have an end.
They do not ride endlessly through the seals.
Their place within the vision is bounded.
Perhaps that itself is worth noticing.
The horsemen feel enormous while we are watching them.
But Revelation contains far more than horsemen.
There are still:
Martyrs.
Angels.
Saints.
Trumpets.
Witnesses.
Worship.
Victory.
A new heaven.
A new earth.
And eventually:
A city where Death is no more.
The horsemen are part of the story.
They are not:
The story.

14. The Center Has Still Not Moved

Four seals have opened.
Three horses have appeared.
The fourth is about to enter.
Peace has disappeared.
Scarcity has arrived.
And yet:
The center has not moved.
The throne remains.
The Lamb remains.
The scroll remains in His hands.
The horsemen may move.
The world may shake.
Death itself may ride.
But the center: Does not move.
Perhaps that is precisely what faith needs when everything around us seems unstable.
Not an assurance that nothing will move.
But confidence that: **Something will not.**

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when we can see trouble coming.

We do not know exactly what form it will take.
But we know:
Something is changing.
And waiting can become its own kind of suffering.
Verse 7 lives in that moment.
The seal has opened.
The summons has sounded.
The horse has not yet appeared.
Sometimes faith lives right there.
We cannot see verse 8 yet.
We only know that something is coming.
And in those moments, our minds often write the next verse for us.
Usually:
The worst possible version.
Fear is very good at writing verses God has not shown us yet.
Revelation offers another way.
Before we imagine what comes next:
Look at the Lamb.
Remember who holds the scroll.
Remember what you already know.
The future may contain something difficult.
But whatever comes next enters a story in which Christ has already died—
and risen.

Something Worth Pondering

The fourth creature says:
"Come and see."
And Death is about to answer.
But Death is not the only one present.
The Lamb is there first.
That order matters.
Before Death appears:
The Lamb who survived Death is already standing.
Perhaps that is one of the deepest sources of Christian endurance.
We do not believe Death is unreal.
We do not pretend Death does not hurt.
We do not deny the grief Death leaves behind.
We simply refuse to give Death a title Scripture does not give it:
Lord.
Death rides.
Christ reigns.
Death enters.

Christ remains.
Death has a season.
Christ has eternity.
Death rides.
The Lamb stands.
And because the Lamb stands:
Rock bottom is never the bottom of God's story.

Ask Yourself This:

When I know something difficult may be coming, do I allow fear to write the next verse before God has shown it to me?
Can I face painful realities honestly without allowing them to become greater in my mind than the God who remains sovereign over them?
When life seems to move from one hardship to another, can I remember that the horsemen themselves have boundaries?
Do I live as though Death has the final word—or as someone who follows the Lamb who was slaughtered and yet stands?
And when everything around me seems to be moving, can I anchor my faith in this simple truth:
The horsemen move.
The throne does not.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:8

“And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.”
— Revelation 6:8, KJV

John looks.
The fourth summons has sounded.
“Come and see.”
And now the final horse appears.
There is no ambiguity about this rider.
John gives him a name:
Death.
And Death does not ride alone.
Behind him follows:
Hades.
The picture is chilling.
Death takes life.
Hades receives the dead.
Together they move across the earth.
But then John tells us something that changes how we must see them:
“Power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth.”
Given.
A fourth.
Death is powerful.
But Death is not sovereign.
Death has authority.
But Death's authority has boundaries.
And perhaps that is the truth we most need to remember while looking at the pale green horse.

1. “I Looked”

Again John says:
“I looked.”
The fourth living creature has spoken.
John now turns his attention toward whatever has answered the summons.
And this time he sees the darkest image yet.
The first horseman was unnamed.
The second was unnamed.
The third was unnamed.

But the fourth rider requires no speculation.
John knows exactly what he is looking at.
Death.
There are some realities Scripture does not soften with euphemisms.
This is one of them.

2. "A Pale Horse"

The horse is:
"Pale."
The Greek word translated "pale" describes a sickly greenish color.
It is the color of life draining away.
The other horses were associated with what their riders brought.
White.
Bright red.
Black.
Now the final horse bears the color of:
Death.
It is an unsettling image because there is nothing attractive about it.
Death may sometimes be romanticized from a distance.
Revelation does not romanticize it.
Death is an enemy.
And this horse looks like one.

3. "His Name That Sat on Him Was Death"

Finally:
A name.
"Death."
John does not say the rider merely causes death.
The rider personifies it.
Death itself appears to ride across the earth.
That gives visible form to something every human being eventually confronts.
Death enters:
Families.
Communities.
Nations.
Generations.
No earthly status makes someone permanently immune.
Kings die.
The wealthy die.
The powerful die.
The poor die.
The unknown die.
Death has ridden through every century of human history.

And now John sees it.
On horseback.

4. Death Has a Name, But Death Is Not God

Giving Death a name makes it frighteningly personal.
But we should notice what John does not do.
He does not worship Death.
He does not place Death upon the throne.
He does not give Death the scroll.
He does not call Death:
Almighty.
Death is a creature within the vision.
A terrible one.
A powerful one.
But still:
Not God.
That distinction is fundamental to Christian hope.
Death may be something we must face.
Death is not Someone we must worship.

5. "Hell Followed With Him"

Then John says:
"Hell Followed With Him."
Death rides.
Hades follows.
The KJV's "Hell" here translates Hades, the realm of the dead. In this scene it follows Death, receiving those whom Death takes; it should not simply be equated with Revelation's final lake of fire.
The image is almost like a terrible procession.
Death takes.
Hades receives.
One rides ahead.
The other follows behind.
And together they appear formidable.
But Revelation has already told us something about both of them.
Back in Chapter 1, the risen Christ declared:
"I have the keys of hell and of death."
That changes the picture dramatically.
Death appears in Chapter 6.
Hades follows.
But neither one possesses the keys.
Christ does.

6. The One With the Keys

That may be one of the most important connections in the entire verse.

Before John ever saw Death riding, he saw the risen Christ.
And Christ told him:
“I was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.”
Then:
“I have the keys of hell and of death.”
Now both appear.
Death.
Hades.
But Revelation has already established who possesses authority over them.
They may ride.
They may follow.
They may frighten.
But the keys belong to:
Jesus Christ.
Perhaps this is another example of why Revelation must be read as a whole.
If we begin with Chapter 6, Death looks terrifyingly powerful.
If we remember Chapter 1:
Death is already locked inside a story whose keys belong to Someone else.

7. “Power Was Given Unto Them”

Then comes the phrase we have been watching for:
“Power was given unto them.”
Again:
Given.
The first rider's crown:
Was given.
The second rider:
Was permitted.
His sword:
Was given.
The third rider encountered the command:
“Hurt not...”
Now Death and Hades:
“Power was given unto them.”
The pattern is unmistakable.
None of the horsemen possesses autonomous, unlimited sovereignty.
Their authority is derived.
Their activity is bounded.
Their power is real.
But:

Their power is not ultimate.

8. “Over the Fourth Part of the Earth”

And John gives us the boundary:
“The fourth part of the earth.”
That is enormous.
We should not minimize it.
A fourth represents terrible devastation.
But:
A fourth is not all.
The number itself places a limit around the judgment.
Death is given authority.
But not over everything.
The pale horse rides.
But it does not consume the whole earth.
Once again:
The chaos has a boundary.
And this time the boundary is placed around Death itself.

9. Limited Does Not Mean Small

There is a danger here.
When we emphasize that the authority is limited, we must not accidentally minimize the suffering.
A fourth of the earth is staggering.
Limited does not mean:
Insignificant.
A single death can devastate an entire family.
A single grave can leave an empty chair that never quite stops feeling empty.
Multiply that suffering across nations and generations, and the scale becomes almost impossible to imagine.
Revelation allows both truths to stand.
Death is terrible.
Death is limited.
We do not need to weaken either statement in order to affirm the other.

10. “To Kill With Sword”

The first means of death John names is:
“Sword.”
We have already seen the great sword associated with the second horseman.
Now the consequences continue.
Violence kills.
War kills.
Human beings slaughter one another.

The sword that appeared earlier has reached its destination.
Death follows violence.
Again the horsemen seem interconnected.
What one begins, another completes.

11. “Hunger”

Then:
“Hunger.”
Now the black horse returns to mind.
The scales.
The wheat.
The barley.
The day's wages.
Scarcity can become something worse.
When food becomes sufficiently scarce:
People die.
The progression becomes painfully clear.
What began as economic distress can become a matter of life and death.
The scales of the third horseman eventually feed the procession of the fourth.

12. “Death”

The KJV next names:
“Death.”
Here death can carry the sense of pestilence, echoing the biblical pattern of sword, famine, disease, and wild beasts.
Plague.
Illness spreading through populations.
Again we encounter a form of suffering that does not require a sword.
Death has many instruments.
Some are carried by human hands.
Others move invisibly.
And human beings throughout history have known the terror of diseases they could neither see nor control.
Revelation gathers these realities together under the pale horse.
Sword.
Famine.
Pestilence.
Different roads.
Same destination.
Death.

13. “The Beasts of the Earth”

Finally:
“The Beasts of the Earth.”

The image echoes the language of judgment found elsewhere in Scripture.
It also adds to the sense that ordinary order has broken down.
Human society becomes unstable.
Food becomes scarce.
Disease spreads.
Even the relationship between humanity and the created world becomes dangerous.
The picture is not merely of one isolated catastrophe.
It is of creation experiencing the consequences of a world profoundly out of order.

14. The Four Horsemen Together

Now all four have appeared.
White.
Red.
Black.
Pale green.
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
Death.
We can finally see the complete progression.
And perhaps the horsemen are most meaningful when viewed together.
They represent forces human beings have encountered again and again.
One can lead into another.
The hunger for conquest creates war.
War destroys peace.
War disrupts economies and food supplies.
Scarcity follows.
Disease spreads.
Death comes behind them all.
It is a terrible procession.
But Revelation does not call it:
Eternal.

15. Death Is the Fourth Rider, Not the Final Chapter

That distinction matters.
Death is:
The fourth rider.
But Revelation has:
Twenty-two chapters.
Death may appear enormous in Chapter 6.
But John is nowhere near finished.

The story continues.
There will eventually come a moment when John says:
"There shall be no more death."
And later still, Death and Hades—the very pair we meet here—will themselves face judgment.
The figures that terrify humanity in Chapter 6 do not survive Revelation.
That is worth remembering.
Death appears in the story.
Death does not survive the story.

16. Death Rides; the Lamb Stands

We discovered this contrast in verse 7.
Now verse 8 makes it visible.
Death:
Rides.
The Lamb:
Stands.
And we have already learned why the Lamb stands.
He too experienced death.
He was:
Slaughtered.
Yet John saw Him:
Standing.
Death has already done its worst to the Lamb.
And the Lamb is still there.
That is the heart of Christian hope.
Christianity does not promise that believers will never encounter Death.
It proclaims that Death has encountered Christ.
And lost.

17. Rock Bottom Has a Basement—and Christ Has Been There

Sometimes life reaches places that feel like the absolute bottom.
The diagnosis becomes terminal.
The relationship cannot be repaired.
The person we prayed for dies.
The grave is closed.
There seems to be nowhere farther down to go.
Death feels like:
Rock bottom.
But the Christian proclamation is astonishing.
Christ went there too.
Into death.
Into the grave.

Into the place from which human beings do not return by their own strength.
And then:
He stood.
Perhaps that means there is no depth into which the believer can fall where Christ has not already gone.
Even at rock bottom:
We do not discover His absence.
We discover that He has been there before us.

18. Death Does Not Hold the Keys

Perhaps that is the sentence we should carry away from this verse.
Death rides.
Hades follows.
But neither carries:
The keys.
The keys belong to Christ.
Death may enter our story.
It may interrupt our plans.
It may separate us temporarily from people we love.
It may bring grief unlike anything else we experience.
But Death does not possess ultimate authority over those who belong to Christ.
The pale horse has been given authority.
Christ possesses authority.
Those are not the same thing.

Pastoral Reflection

Death is one subject none of us can keep permanently at a distance.
Eventually it becomes personal.
Someone we love dies.
A chair becomes empty.
A voice we knew becomes a memory.
A familiar face survives only in photographs.
And theological language that once seemed abstract suddenly matters very much.
At those moments, Christians should never pretend Death is harmless.
Scripture does not.
Death is called:
An enemy.
Grief is real because love is real.
But Revelation asks us to grieve while remembering something the pale horse would prefer us to forget.
Death does not hold the keys.

Jesus does.
The pale horse may arrive.
But it cannot carry us somewhere Christ has not already been.
He entered death.
He passed through it.
And He stands on the other side.
Perhaps Christian hope is not saying:
"I am not afraid of the grave."
Perhaps sometimes it is simply saying:
"I know who has the keys."

Something Worth Pondering

John sees Death.
He sees Hades.
He sees sword.
Famine.
Pestilence.
Wild animals.
The picture is bleak.
Perhaps:
Rock bottom.
But then notice the language.
"Power was given unto them."
Given.
Not possessed inherently.
Not unlimited.
Not eternal.
Given.
And only:
"Over the fourth part."
Death has boundaries.
Death has limits.
Death has a future judgment.
Death even has Someone else holding its keys.
That changes the meaning of the pale horse.
It is still frightening.
But it is no longer ultimate.
The Christian does not look at Death and say:
"You are nothing."
The Christian looks at Death and says:
"You are not Lord."
There is a profound difference.

Ask Yourself This:

When I think about death, do I treat it as though it possesses the final word over my life and the lives of those I love?
Can I allow myself to grieve honestly without confusing grief with hopelessness?
When circumstances reach what feels like rock bottom, can I remember that Christ has already entered the deepest darkness and emerged from it alive?
Do I recognize the difference between the authority Death is temporarily given and the authority that belongs eternally to Christ?
And when the pale horse appears frighteningly large, can I remember:
Death rides.
Hades follows.
But Jesus holds the keys.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:9

“And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:”
— Revelation 6:9, KJV

The fifth seal opens.
And everything changes.
No living creature cries:
“Come and see.”
No horse appears.
No rider carries a weapon.
Instead, John looks beneath:
The altar.
And there he sees:
“The souls of them that were slain.”
Suddenly the suffering of Revelation becomes deeply personal.
The first four seals showed us forces moving through the world.
Conquest.
War.
Scarcity.
Death.
But the fifth seal shows us:
People.
People who suffered.
People who died.
People who remained faithful.
And most importantly:
People whom God has not forgotten.

1. “When He Had Opened the Fifth Seal”

Once again:
“When he had opened...”
The Lamb continues opening the scroll.
Four seals have summoned four horsemen.
Now:
The fifth seal.
But the pattern changes.
That tells us the seals are not merely a repetitive series of disasters.
The vision is developing.
John is being shown something deeper.
The first four seals showed what happens upon the earth.

The fifth takes our eyes back toward heaven.
And there John discovers something about the people who suffered on earth.
They are still known.

2. The Horses Stop

Perhaps we should notice the silence.
Four times John heard:
“Come and see.”
Four horses appeared.
Now:
Nothing rides.
The pounding of hoofbeats, so to speak, stops.
The vision slows.
And our attention moves from great forces of history to individual human beings.
That is significant.
Revelation will never allow suffering to remain merely:
Statistics.
Casualty numbers.
Historical events.
Economic consequences.
Behind all of those things are:
People.
And heaven sees them.

3. “I Saw”

John says:
“I saw.”
What he sees is not another catastrophe.
He sees those who have already passed through catastrophe.
The world saw them die.
John sees them:
Alive before God.
That difference in perspective is enormous.
Earth saw:
Victims.
Heaven sees:
Witnesses.
Earth saw:
Defeat.
Heaven sees:
Faithfulness.
Earth saw:

Death.
John sees:
Souls beneath the altar.
Once again Revelation asks us to see earthly reality from heaven's perspective.

4. “Under the Altar”

John sees them:
“Under the altar.”
The imagery is rich.
Within the sacrificial system of Israel, blood from sacrifices was associated with the altar and could be poured at its base.
Life belonged to God.
And here the faithful dead are pictured beneath:
The altar.
Their deaths are therefore not portrayed as meaningless.
Their lives have been poured out in faithfulness to God.
That does not mean God delights in their deaths.
It means their deaths have not disappeared into meaninglessness.
The world may have discarded them.
Heaven receives them.
Their lives belong to God.

5. Beneath the Altar Is Not Beneath God's Notice

There is something beautifully pastoral about their location.
They are:
Under the altar.
But they are not:
Hidden from God.
Sometimes suffering makes people feel invisible.
No one sees.
No one understands.
No one remembers.
Perhaps that feeling was especially powerful for the Christians who first heard Revelation.
Some had faced opposition.
Some faced imprisonment.
Some might die.
The empire could treat their deaths as insignificant.
But heaven does not.
God knows exactly where His faithful people are.
Beneath the altar is not beneath God's notice.

6. “The Souls”

John sees:

“The souls...”
We should allow Revelation's visionary language to remain visionary.
John's purpose here is not to give us a technical anatomy of the intermediate state.
He is showing us something pastorally and theologically important:
Those who died faithful to God have not ceased to matter.
Death did not erase them.
The pale horse did not carry them beyond God's reach.
Death rode in verse 8.
But verse 9 immediately shows us:
Death did not win.
That sequence may be intentional.
Verse 8:
Death.
Verse 9:
The faithful dead are with God.
The pale horse can kill.
It cannot erase.

7. “Them That Were Slain”

John uses a difficult word:
“Slain.”
Not:
Passed away.
Not:
Died peacefully.
Not:
Completed their earthly lives.
Slaughtered.
It is violent language.
And we have heard it before.
In Chapter 5 John saw:
“A Lamb as it had been slain.”
Now he sees people who also:
“Were slain.”
That connection is difficult to miss.
The Lamb was slaughtered.
His witnesses were slaughtered.
Their faithfulness has followed the pattern of their Lord.
That does not mean Christians seek suffering.
Revelation never glorifies pain for its own sake.
But it does mean suffering cannot be interpreted as proof that Christ has abandoned His people.

The Lamb Himself bears the marks of slaughter.

8. The Slaughtered Lamb and the Slaughtered Saints

There is something profound here.
The people beneath the altar are united with Christ not merely because they believed something about Him.
Their lives came to resemble His.
The Lamb remained faithful unto death.
So did they.
The Lamb was slaughtered.
So were they.
The Lamb appeared defeated.
So did they.
But:
The Lamb stands.
And now:
They remain before God.
The world may have believed killing them proved their weakness.
Revelation interprets their deaths differently.
Their willingness to remain faithful demonstrates that the world's power could not purchase their allegiance.
Their bodies could be killed.
Their testimony could not be conquered.

9. "For the Word of God"

Why were they slaughtered?
John tells us.
"For the word of God."
Their deaths were connected to their faithfulness.
They belonged to God.
They held to His word.
And they refused to surrender that allegiance when it became costly.
This is important because not every experience of suffering is martyrdom.
These people are not honored simply because they suffered.
They suffered:
"For the word of God."
Their faithfulness had consequences.
They could apparently have avoided those consequences by abandoning their witness.
They did not.

10. "And for the Testimony"

John adds:
"And for the testimony which they held."

Testimony is one of Revelation's important words.
Faith is not merely something these people privately possessed.
They:
Testified.
They bore witness.
They identified themselves with Christ.
They told the truth about whom they belonged to.
And their testimony cost them.
There are moments when Christian faith is comfortable.
There are other moments when saying:
"I belong to Christ"
carries consequences.
These believers encountered the second kind.
And still:
They testified.

11. Their Testimony Outlived Their Killers

There is an irony here worth noticing.
Someone killed these witnesses, presumably intending to silence them.
Yet:
John hears about them in heaven.
Their testimony survives.
Their persecutors may have stopped their voices on earth.
They did not stop their witness.
Indeed, centuries later, the Church still reads about them.
That means their testimony became louder than the violence intended to silence it.
There is something extraordinary about faithful witness.
A person can be killed.
But truth is not so easily buried.

12. Faithfulness Did Not Protect Them From Suffering

This verse also confronts a dangerous misunderstanding.
These people were faithful.
And:
They died.
Their faithfulness did not guarantee physical safety.
Their testimony did not create immunity from persecution.
God did not prevent every violent hand from touching them.
Revelation is painfully realistic about this.
The promise of Christianity is not:
Follow Jesus and nothing terrible will happen to you.
The Lamb Himself disproves that.
The promise is deeper:

Nothing that happens to you can separate you from the One to whom you belong.
The martyrs died.
But John still sees them.

13. Sometimes Faith Endures All the Way Through

We named this series:
When Faith Must Endure.
Here we encounter perhaps the most demanding form of endurance imaginable.
These believers endured:
Not until circumstances improved.
Not until persecution stopped.
Not until someone rescued them.
They endured:
To death.
That is sobering.
But Revelation does not show them as failures.
It shows them:
Beneath the altar.
Their endurance was not measured by whether they escaped suffering.
It was measured by whether they remained faithful through it.
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not change.
And sometimes:
Faith endures all the way home.

14. Heaven Remembers What Earth Forgets

Human history forgets people remarkably quickly.
Names disappear.
Records are lost.
Generations move on.
Even great tragedies eventually become paragraphs in history books.
But Revelation presents another record.
Heaven remembers.
God knows:
Who suffered.
Why they suffered.
What they said.
What they refused to surrender.
The people beneath the altar are not anonymous to God.
John may not give us their names.
God knows every one.
Perhaps that matters for every person who has ever wondered:

Does my faithfulness matter if nobody notices?
Yes.
Heaven notices.

15. The Fifth Seal Gives the Victims a Voice

And there is something else coming.
Verse 9 shows them.
Verse 10 will let them:
Speak.
That is important.
Victims are often spoken about.
Others interpret their suffering.
Others explain what happened.
Others tell their stories.
But Revelation gives these martyrs their own voice.
And what they say is not a serene theological lecture.
They cry:
"How long?"
That may be one of the most honest prayers in Scripture.
But before God allows us to hear their question, verse 9 tells us who they are.
Faithful witnesses.
Their lament comes from:
Faith.
Not its absence.

16. The Altar Changes the Meaning of Their Death

From earth, their deaths may have looked meaningless.
Perhaps they were executed publicly.
Perhaps their enemies celebrated.
Perhaps someone concluded:
Their God did not save them.
But heaven places their lives:
Under the altar.
Their deaths are seen in relationship to God.
And that changes everything.
The same event can look completely different depending upon where we stand.
Earth says:
They lost.
Heaven says:
They remained faithful.
Earth says:
They were silenced.

Heaven hears:
Their testimony.
Earth says:
They are gone.
John says:
“I saw.”

17. Death Rode—But It Did Not Take Them Away From God

The placement of verses 8 and 9 is powerful.
Verse 8:
“His Name That Sat on Him Was Death.”
Verse 9:
“I saw...the souls of them that were slain.”
Death rides.
And immediately Revelation shows us Death's limitation.
Death can separate soul from earthly life.
Death can create grief.
Death can end a witness's earthly ministry.
But Death cannot remove that person from God.
The fourth horseman looked terrifying.
The fifth seal shows us:
He is not ultimate.
Death can take life.
Death cannot take belonging.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us want faithfulness to produce visible results.
We obey.
Something improves.
We pray.
Something changes.
We serve.
Someone notices.
We remain faithful.
And eventually everything works out.
Sometimes it does.
But Revelation 6:9 introduces us to people whose faithfulness did not produce an earthly rescue.
They remained faithful.
And they were slaughtered.
That is difficult.
Yet heaven does not call their lives wasted.
God does not say:
“You should have tried harder.”

He does not ask:
“Why didn't you escape?”
John sees them:
Beneath the altar.
Sometimes faithfulness is not measured by whether we changed the outcome.
Sometimes faithfulness is simply:
We did not surrender who we belonged to.
That truth applies far beyond martyrdom.
There may be seasons when we pray and circumstances do not change.
We remain faithful in a difficult marriage.
We care for someone whose health continues declining.
We serve without recognition.
We forgive someone who never apologizes.
We trust while answers remain absent.
And we wonder:
Does any of this matter?
Revelation 6:9 says:
Heaven notices faithfulness that earth may never reward.

Something Worth Pondering

The fourth rider's name was:
Death.
That sounded terribly final.
Then the Lamb opened the fifth seal.
And John said:
“I saw.”
There they were.
The people Death supposedly defeated.
Still known.
Still remembered.
Still belonging to God.
And in the next verse:
Still speaking.
Perhaps that is one of Revelation's quietest victories.
Death rode across verse 8.
But Death could not erase the people we meet in verse 9.
The pale horse had authority.
But:
It did not have the final word.
The martyrs' enemies could take their lives.
They could not take their faithfulness.
They could silence their earthly voices.

They could not silence their testimony.
They could kill them.
They could not make God forget them.
Earth may forget the faithful.
Heaven never does.

Ask Yourself This:

Do I sometimes measure God's faithfulness by whether He prevents suffering from entering my life?
Can I remain faithful even when obedience does not produce the outcome I hoped for?
Have I ever assumed that quiet faithfulness does not matter because nobody seems to notice it?
When I think about death, do I remember that Death can end earthly life but cannot sever our belonging to Christ?
And if remaining faithful ever costs me more than I expected—
can I trust that the Lamb who was slaughtered understands completely what it means:
To remain faithful even when faithfulness hurts?

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:10

“And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”
— Revelation 6:10, KJV

They speak.
The people beneath the altar are not silent.
They have suffered.
They have died.
They have remained faithful.
And now their voices rise before God:
“How long?”
Perhaps few prayers are more human than that.
How long will suffering continue?
How long will injustice seem to prosper?
How long will evil appear to go unanswered?
How long will God's people wait?
Notice what they do not ask.
They do not ask:
“Are You there?”
They do not ask:
“Are You really God?”
They do not ask:
“Do You care?”
They address Him as:
“O Lord.
Holy.
True.”
Their question comes from faith.
And because they believe God is sovereign, holy, and true, they cannot understand why injustice continues.
Sometimes:
“How long?” is not the language of unbelief.
Sometimes it is precisely the language of faith.

1. “They Cried”

John says:
“They Cried.”
This is not casual conversation.
This is lament.
There is pain in their prayer.

There is urgency.
There is longing.
These are people who have experienced terrible injustice.
They were slaughtered because of their faithfulness to God and their testimony.
Now they cry to the God they trusted.
Scripture does not rebuke them for doing so.
That matters.
Faith does not require us to pretend suffering does not hurt.
Faith does not require us to speak to God as though everything is fine when it is not.
Sometimes faith:
Cries out.

2. "With a Loud Voice"

Their cry is:
"With a loud voice."
Their suffering will not be whispered away.
Heaven does not silence them.
God does not say:
Lower your voice.
He does not demand that they hide their anguish beneath polite religious language.
Their lament is allowed to be:
Loud.
There is something profoundly reassuring about that.
God is not intimidated by the volume of human grief.
He is not offended when wounded people speak honestly.
The people beneath the altar bring their pain directly into the presence of God.
And heaven makes room for their cry.

3. Faith Can Have a Loud Voice

Sometimes we imagine mature faith as always:
Quiet.
Calm.
Untroubled.
Certain.
But Scripture contains another kind of faith.
Faith that:
Weeps.
Questions.
Laments.
Cries.

“How long?”
The Psalms know this language well.
The prophets know it.
The martyrs know it.
And God receives it.
Perhaps mature faith is not the absence of difficult questions.
Perhaps mature faith knows:
Where to take them.
The martyrs do not turn away from God with their question.
They turn:
Toward Him.

4. “O Lord”

Before they ask:
“How long?”
they say:
“O Lord.”
That order is remarkable.
Their question begins with an affirmation of God's authority.
They believe He reigns.
And precisely because He reigns, they ask why injustice continues.
Their theology creates the question.
If God were powerless, there would be little reason to ask:
“How long?”
If God did not care, there would be little reason to cry out.
But they believe:
He is Sovereign Lord.
Therefore:
They expect Him to act.

5. “Holy”

Then they call Him:
“Holy.”
God is not morally indifferent.
He is not neutral between:
Good and evil.
Truth and falsehood.
Justice and oppression.
Faithfulness and cruelty.
The martyrs suffered because of their testimony.
Their blood was shed unjustly.
And they appeal to the holiness of God.
They believe the character of God means evil cannot remain unanswered forever.

Their hope for justice rests not merely upon what God can do.
It rests upon:
Who God is.

6. "And True"

They also call Him:
"True."
God can be trusted.
His promises are dependable.
His judgments are right.
His character does not change.
And yet:
They are still waiting.
There is the tension.
God is:
Sovereign.
Holy.
True.
But justice has not yet fully come.
That tension is where:
"How long?"
is born.
And every generation of believers has lived somewhere inside that tension.
We know who God is.
We know what God has promised.
But we have not yet seen everything brought to completion.
So we wait.

7. "How Long?"

Two words can carry an enormous amount of pain.
"How long?"
Not:
"Why?"
Though surely that question exists too.
Not:
"Will You?"
They apparently trust that He will.
Their question is:
"When?"
How much longer must evil continue?
How much longer before justice arrives?
How much longer before wrongs are made right?
"How long?" is the prayer of people caught between:

Promise.
And fulfillment.
They know God will act.
They simply do not know:
When.

8. Waiting Can Be Harder Than Knowing

Sometimes the most difficult answer God gives is not:
"No."
Sometimes it is:
"Not yet."
A clear no can eventually be faced.
But:
Not yet—
requires endurance.
Not yet means:
Keep trusting.
Keep waiting.
Keep believing.
Keep hoping.
Even though nothing appears to have changed.
That may be one of the hardest forms of faith.
And these martyrs understand it.
They have already endured unto death.
Yet even in heaven they ask:
"How long?"

9. Faithful People Still Ask Questions

Perhaps this verse should permanently remove the idea that questions indicate weak faith.
Look at who is asking.
These are not casual believers.
They remained faithful when faithfulness cost them their lives.
If anyone has demonstrated commitment, they have.
And still:
They have questions.
That means faith and questions are not enemies.
There is a difference between questioning God:
From faith.
And abandoning God:
Because of questions.
The martyrs do the first.
They bring the unanswered question directly to Him.

10. “Dost Thou Not Judge”

They ask:
“How long...dost thou not judge...?”
Judgment can be uncomfortable language for us.
But imagine hearing this verse from beneath the altar.
Imagine hearing it as someone who has been:
Oppressed.
Persecuted.
Abused.
Killed.
Suddenly judgment sounds different.
To the oppressor, judgment is threatening.
To the victim:
Judgment may sound like hope.
A world in which God never judges evil would be a world in which evil ultimately receives no answer.
The martyrs do not want that kind of universe.
They want a God who takes suffering seriously.
And Revelation says:
He does.

11. Justice Matters Because People Matter

Sometimes judgment is presented as though it conflicts with love.
But genuine love cannot remain indifferent toward what destroys the beloved.
If someone harms a child, love does not shrug.
If someone exploits the weak, love does not say:
It does not matter.
If innocent blood is shed, love does not call that morally insignificant.
Justice matters because:
People matter.
The martyrs' blood matters because:
Their lives mattered.
God's judgment declares that evil does not receive the final word about what happened to them.

12. “And Avenge Our Blood”

This phrase requires care.
“Avenge our blood.”
The martyrs are not pictured taking vengeance themselves.
They appeal to:
God.
That distinction is essential.
They do not climb from beneath the altar carrying swords.

They do not hunt down their enemies.
They do not say:
Give us permission to retaliate.
They place judgment in God's hands.
Their prayer is essentially:
You judge.
You make this right.
You answer what was done.
That is very different from personal revenge.
Faith entrusts justice to God precisely because human vengeance so easily becomes another horseman.

13. Vengeance Belongs Somewhere Other Than Our Hands

There is tremendous pastoral wisdom here.
When we are wounded, the desire to make someone else hurt can become powerful.
We may rehearse:
What they did.
What we should say.
How we could make them pay.
But resentment can slowly make the offender continue controlling our lives long after the original injury.
The martyrs show another path.
They tell God exactly what happened.
They ask Him for justice.
Then they leave judgment:
With Him.
That does not mean injustice should never be confronted through appropriate human means.
It means ultimate judgment does not belong to us.
We can seek justice without becoming consumed by vengeance.

14. “Our Blood”

Notice how personal the prayer becomes.
“Our blood.”
This is not theoretical theology.
They are talking about what happened:
To them.
Their blood was shed.
Their lives were taken.
Their suffering was real.
God does not ask them to depersonalize it.
They do not have to say:
Something unfortunate occurred.

They can say:
“Our blood.”
There is something healing about knowing that God allows us to name the wound.
We do not have to minimize what happened in order to forgive.
We do not have to pretend evil was acceptable in order to entrust judgment to God.
We can say:
This was wrong.
This hurt.
This mattered.
And then place it before:
The Sovereign Lord.

15. “On Them That Dwell on the Earth”

Their persecutors belonged to the earthly order that opposed God's testimony.
Revelation will continue developing this contrast between those whose allegiance belongs to God and those aligned with rebellious earthly powers.
But we should be careful not to turn the martyrs' prayer into indiscriminate hatred of humanity.
The emphasis is upon those responsible for the bloodshed and the world system opposed to God.
Indeed, Revelation will continue calling people to repentance.
Judgment and mercy remain present throughout the book.
God's delay itself may contain:
Opportunity.
But the delay will not last forever.

16. God Has Not Forgotten the Case

There is another implication in their prayer.
If they ask God to judge, they believe:
God knows what happened.
No evidence has been lost.
No testimony has disappeared.
No injustice has been forgotten.
Human courts may fail.
Records may vanish.
Witnesses may die.
The powerful may rewrite history.
But heaven's memory is not so easily erased.
The martyrs' blood still speaks before God.
Their case remains open.

Justice may be delayed.
It is not:
Forgotten.

17. The Silence Between Promise and Fulfillment

This may be one of the hardest places in the Christian life.
We believe God is good.
But suffering continues.
We believe God hears prayer.
But the answer has not arrived.
We believe God can intervene.
But He has not intervened in the way we hoped.
We believe God will ultimately make things right.
But:
Today is not that day.
That space between:
What God has promised.
And what we presently experience—
is where endurance lives.
It is where faith learns to say:
"I still trust You."
And sometimes, in the very same breath:
"How long?"

18. "How Long?" Is Still a Prayer

Perhaps that is the most important pastoral truth in the verse.
"How long?"
is addressed to God.
Therefore:
It is prayer.
A wounded prayer.
An impatient prayer.
A grieving prayer.
A desperate prayer.
But:
Prayer.
The martyrs are still talking to God.
Sometimes when people are hurting, they worry that their questions offend Him.
Revelation 6:10 suggests something different.
God would rather receive the honest cry of a wounded heart than religious words that pretend there is no wound.
"How long?" can still be:
Faith.

Because faith keeps the conversation with God open.

19. The Answer Will Not Be "Never"

Verse 11 will give them an answer.
And it will not be the answer they might have preferred.
They will be told:
To rest.
"A little season."
In other words:
Not yet.
But notice what God does not say.
He does not say:
Never.
He does not say:
I have forgotten.
He does not say:
Your suffering does not matter.
He does not say:
Justice will never come.
The answer to:
"How long?"
is ultimately:
Not forever.
That may be enough to sustain faith when the timetable remains hidden.

20. Sometimes Faith Sounds Like "How Long?"

We often imagine faith sounding like:
"I understand."
"I am confident."
"I know exactly what God is doing."
But sometimes mature faith sounds very different.
Sometimes it sounds like:
"I do not understand."
"This hurts."
"I have waited."
"I am tired."
"How long?"
And still:
"O Lord."
That is the key.
The question does not erase the confession.
They ask:
"How long?"
But they still call Him:

Sovereign.
Holy.
True.
Perhaps that is endurance in its purest form.
Faith does not always have the answer.
Sometimes faith simply knows Who should hear the question.

Pastoral Reflection

There will probably be a:
"How long?"
somewhere in every Christian life.
How long will I deal with this illness?
How long will this grief hurt?
How long will my child struggle?
How long will this relationship remain broken?
How long will I wait for an answer?
How long will injustice continue?
How long before something changes?
And sometimes we may feel guilty for asking.
We imagine stronger Christians would simply accept everything without question.
But beneath the altar are some of the most faithful people in Revelation.
And they ask:
"How long?"
God does not rebuke them.
He listens.
Perhaps we should learn from that.
Bring God the question.
Bring Him the frustration.
Bring Him the disappointment.
Bring Him the anger.
Bring Him the tears.
You do not have to clean up your pain before you pray.
Just remember where the martyrs begin:
"O Lord, holy and true..."
They do not understand the timetable.
But they still know:
Who God is.
And sometimes that is enough faith for today.

Something Worth Pondering

The martyrs ask:
"How long?"
And perhaps the most remarkable thing is not the question.

It is what comes before it.
“O Lord, holy and true...”
They are confused about:
God's timing.
But they are not confused about:
God's character.
That distinction may sustain us through some of life's longest nights.
We may not know:
When.
We may not understand:
Why.
We may not see:
How.
But we can still know:
Who.
Sovereign.
Holy.
True.
And perhaps that is enough to keep faith alive between:
The promise.
And the answer.
Sometimes faith says, “I know.”
Sometimes faith says, “I trust.”
And sometimes faith simply cries, “How long?”
All three can still be faith.

Ask Yourself This:

Is there a “How long?” prayer I have been afraid to bring honestly before God?
Have I confused unanswered questions with weak faith?
Can I trust God's character even when I do not understand His timing?
When someone wrongs me, can I seek what is right without allowing vengeance to take possession of my heart?
Can I name what hurt me honestly and still place ultimate judgment in God's hands?
And when the answer seems delayed—
when nothing appears to change—
when I have prayed the same prayer more times than I can remember—
can I still begin:
“O Lord, holy and true...”
and trust that the answer to:

“How long?”
will never finally be:
“Forever.”

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:11

“And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”
— Revelation 6:11, KJV

They asked:
“How long?”
Now comes the answer.
But it is probably not the answer they wanted.
They are not told:
Right now.
They are not told:
The waiting is over.
They are not told:
Everything will immediately be made right.
Instead:
They are given white robes.
They are told to rest.
And then come three difficult words:
“A little season.”
God has heard them.
God has not forgotten them.
God will act.
But:
Not yet.
There is still more of the story to unfold.
And once again Revelation brings us face-to-face with one of the hardest realities of faith:
God's promises are certain.
God's timing is His own.

1. “White Robes Were Given Unto Every One Of Them”

Notice the first thing God does.
Before explaining the delay:
He gives.
“White Robes Were Given Unto Every One of Them...”
There is something personal about:
“Every one of them.”
The martyrs appeared together beneath the altar.
They cried together.

But God does not see merely:
A crowd.
A category.
A number.
He sees:
Each.
Each life.
Each story.
Each wound.
Each testimony.
Each sacrifice.
Each person receives:
A robe.
God's care is never merely statistical.

2. “White Robes”

They are given:
“White Robes.”
White will continue to carry important significance throughout Revelation.
It is associated with:
Purity.
Victory.
Vindication.
Belonging to God.
The world had judged these people one way.
Heaven judges them another.
Their persecutors may have treated them as:
Criminals.
Troublemakers.
Enemies.
Worthless.
Disposable.
But heaven clothes them in:
White.
The robe becomes a visible declaration that earthly judgment did not determine their true identity.

3. Before the Explanation Comes the Robe

The order is beautiful.
God does not begin by giving them a theological lecture about why they must wait.
First:
He gives them a robe.

Before explanation:
Affirmation.
Before timetable:
Grace.
Before:
“A little season”—
comes:
“You belong here.”
Perhaps there is something deeply pastoral in that.
Sometimes when people hurt, our first instinct is to explain.
Why this happened.
Why God allowed it.
What God may be doing.
Perhaps sometimes the better first response is simply:
To stand beside them.
To acknowledge their suffering.
To remind them they are loved.
To give, metaphorically speaking:
The robe before the explanation.

4. The White Robe Is Heaven's Verdict

Their persecutors gave them one verdict.
God gives another.
Earth said:
Condemned.
Heaven says:
Vindicated.
Earth stripped them of life.
Heaven clothes them.
Earth attempted to shame them.
Heaven honors them.
Earth treated their testimony as something worthy of death.
Heaven receives their testimony as faithfulness.
The white robe therefore says something without words:
You were not wrong to remain faithful.
That may be exactly what these martyrs needed to know.

5. “That They Should Rest”

Then comes an unexpected command:
“Rest.”
They asked for:
Action.
God gives them:
Rest.

They asked:
“How long?”
God essentially says:
You do not need to carry the timetable.
Rest.
There is something wonderfully freeing about that.
The martyrs are not responsible for making justice happen.
They do not have to manage history.
They do not have to force God's hand.
They do not have to calculate the day.
They can:
Rest.
Because God remains responsible for what comes next.

6. Rest Is an Act of Trust

Rest can be surprisingly difficult.
Especially when something remains unresolved.
We want to:
Fix it.
Solve it.
Understand it.
Control it.
Finish it.
Sometimes we even imagine that worrying about something is a way of working on it.
But God tells the martyrs:
Rest.
Perhaps rest becomes possible when we finally accept:
God is still working even when we are not.
That does not mean passivity where action is required.
But there are things no human being can control.
And once we have faithfully done what belongs to us, faith sometimes requires us to leave what remains:
With God.

7. “A Little Season”

And now the difficult part.
“A little season.”
From God's perspective:
A little.
From ours:
Perhaps a lifetime.
That is one of the tensions running throughout Scripture.
God's timetable and ours rarely seem identical.

We ask:
How long?
God says:
A little longer.
We look at the calendar.
God looks at:
The whole story.
We see:
This moment.
God sees:
Beginning to end.
And because our vision is limited, waiting can feel much longer than it appears within God's completed purpose.

8. God's "Not Yet"

There are at least three answers we commonly recognize in prayer.
Yes.
No.
And:
Not yet.
Perhaps the third is sometimes the hardest.
Yes gives us what we hoped for.
No gives us something definite to face.
But:
Not yet—
keeps us waiting.
It requires endurance.
It asks us to continue trusting without resolution.
It asks us to believe that God's silence is not:
Absence.
And God's delay is not:
Forgetfulness.
The martyrs receive:
Not yet.

9. Delay Is Not Indifference

This verse makes that unmistakable.
God does not tell them to wait because He does not care.
He has already:
Seen them.
Received them.
Heard them.
Clothed them.
Spoken to them.

Their suffering matters.
Their blood matters.
Their prayer matters.
Justice matters.
But God's answer still includes:
Wait.
Therefore we must learn an important distinction.
God's delay is not evidence of God's indifference.
Sometimes something remains unresolved because God's purposes extend beyond what we can presently see.

10. “Until”

Then comes an important word:
“Until.”
Rest a little longer:
“Until...”
That word means the waiting has:
A boundary.
The martyrs are not told:
Wait forever.
They are told:
Wait until.
There is a destination.
There is a completion.
There is a moment beyond the waiting.
They do not know when.
But God does.
And perhaps that is enough.

11. The Waiting Has an End

This connects beautifully with what we saw in the horsemen.
The chaos had boundaries.
The sword had boundaries.
Scarcity had boundaries.
Death had boundaries.
And now:
Waiting has a boundary.
“Until.”
The word is small.
But hope can sometimes live inside very small words.
Until.
Grief:
Until.
Injustice:

Until.
Waiting:
Until.
The present condition is real.
But it is not:
Permanent.

12. "Should Be Fulfilled"

This is one of the more difficult phrases in the verse.
John speaks of the number being:
"Fulfilled."
We should be careful here.
Revelation is not inviting us to imagine God coldly waiting for a predetermined quota of people to be killed.
That would miss the pastoral movement of the passage.
The emphasis is that history has not yet reached its appointed completion.
More believers will suffer.
More witnesses will remain faithful.
The story is still unfolding.
God knows its completion.
The martyrs do not.
Again:
The timetable belongs to God.

13. God Knows What They Cannot See

The martyrs see:
Their own suffering.
God sees:
The whole story.
They know:
What happened.
God knows:
What remains.
They ask:
How long?
God knows:
Until when.
This is perhaps one of the deepest differences between divine perspective and human perspective.
We experience life:
One moment at a time.
God sees what we cannot.
That does not make our waiting painless.

But it means our inability to understand the timetable does not imply there is no timetable.

14. "Their Fellowservants"

Those still to suffer are called:
"Their Fellowservants."
The martyrs are not alone.
They belong to a community of faithfulness stretching beyond their own lives.
Others will follow.
Others will testify.
Others will endure.
Others will face opposition.
The witness of the Church continues.
One generation passes.
Another takes its place.
The testimony does not end.

15. "Brethren"

Then Revelation uses the language of:
Family.
"Brethren."
Suddenly the verse becomes warmer and more painful at the same time.
These are not merely:
Future martyrs.
They are:
Family.
The Church is connected across:
Places.
Generations.
Cultures.
Even death.
The martyrs beneath the altar belong to the same family as those still struggling upon the earth.
Some have finished their race.
Others are still running.
But:
They belong together.

16. More Suffering Will Come

Then we encounter perhaps the hardest part of the verse.
Others:
"Should be killed as they were."
God does not promise that no more suffering will occur.
He does not tell the martyrs:

You were the last.
Others will follow.
That is difficult.
And Revelation does not soften it.
Faithfulness does not guarantee escape from suffering.
Sometimes God delivers people:
From the fire.
Sometimes God walks with people:
Through the fire.
And sometimes faithful people endure:
All the way home.

17. Sometimes Faith Endures All the Way Home

This brings us directly back to the truth we discovered in verse 9:
Sometimes faith endures until God changes the circumstances.
Sometimes faith endures through circumstances that do not change.
And sometimes faith endures all the way home.
Verse 11 tells us there will be others in that final group.
They will not receive the earthly rescue we might wish for them.
But neither will they be abandoned.
The same heaven that receives the martyrs already beneath the altar will receive:
Them.
The same God who gives white robes to these faithful witnesses knows:
Them.
Death may determine the moment when their earthly testimony ends.
Death will not determine:
Where the witnesses belong.

18. God's Timing Is His Own

Perhaps we would prefer a detailed explanation.
Why not now?
Why allow more suffering?
Why wait?
Why not end everything immediately?
Revelation does not give us a complete philosophical answer here.
Instead, it gives us something harder:
Trust.
God knows.
God sees.
God hears.
God has not forgotten.
God will act.
But:

God's timing is His own.
Faith must sometimes live without knowing:
Why now?
Why later?
Why this way?
Faith rests upon knowing:
Who.

19. We Are Not Given the Calendar

This is especially important when reading Revelation.
People have spent generations trying to turn the book into:
A calendar.
A timetable.
A coded schedule.
But notice something fascinating.
The people beneath the altar themselves ask:
"How long?"
And God does not give them:
A date.
If anyone might reasonably expect to receive the timetable, surely these martyrs could.
Instead:
"Rest yet for a little season."
Perhaps Revelation is telling us something about our own desire to calculate everything.
We may not need the date.
We need:
The Lamb.

20. The Difference Between Waiting and Wasting

Waiting can feel like wasted time.
Nothing is happening.
Nothing is changing.
Nothing is resolved.
But God's:
"A little season"
suggests that waiting and wasting are not the same thing.
The story is still moving even when the martyrs are resting.
God's purposes continue even when they cannot see them.
That may be true in our lives as well.
There are seasons when we feel:
Stuck.
Delayed.
Forgotten.

But perhaps heaven sees movement we cannot yet recognize.
God can be working in the "not yet."

21. You Do Not Have to Carry God's Watch

There is a wonderfully practical lesson hidden here.
The martyrs asked:
How long?
God does not hand them:
A clock.
He gives them:
A robe.
And tells them:
Rest.
Perhaps some of us spend far too much energy trying to carry God's watch.
When will He answer?
When will this change?
When will that happen?
How long?
We keep checking the spiritual clock.
And God may sometimes be saying:
You do not need My watch.
You need My promise.
The timetable belongs to Him.
Trust belongs to us.

22. Rest Does Not Mean God Is Resting

The martyrs are told:
Rest.
God is not.
That distinction matters.
Their part is finished.
Their testimony has been given.
Their faithfulness has been demonstrated.
Now: God carries the story.
Perhaps there comes a point in some situations when we must recognize:
I have done what I can faithfully do.
The rest belongs to God.
That is not giving up.
Sometimes:
That is faith.

23. The Robe, the Rest, and the "Until"

Perhaps the entire verse can be remembered through three things.
The Robe.

You belong to God.
The Rest.
You do not have to control what happens next.
The Until.
The waiting will not last forever.
Those three truths contain remarkable pastoral comfort.
When we cannot understand God's timing:
Remember the robe.
Remember the rest.
Remember the until.

Pastoral Reflection

Waiting is difficult because waiting reminds us that we are not in control.
We pray.
We hope.
We plan.
We work.
We do everything we know to do.
And sometimes:
Nothing changes.
That is where frustration can become:
Fear.
Fear can become:
Doubt.
And doubt can whisper:
Maybe God has forgotten.
Revelation 6:11 answers that whisper.
Look at the martyrs.
God has not forgotten them.
He knows:
Each.
He gives:
Each.
He speaks:
To them.
He knows precisely where history is going.
But He still says:
“A little season.”
Sometimes God's most difficult answer may also be one of His most loving:
Trust Me with the timing.
We may not understand why the answer has not come.
We may not understand why the circumstances remain.

We may not understand why the door has not opened.
But we can still know:
God has not misplaced the calendar.
And perhaps there comes a moment when faith must stop staring at the clock—
and:
Rest.

Something Worth Pondering

They asked:
"How long?"
God gave them:
A robe.
They wanted:
Justice.
God promised:
Completion.
They wanted:
Now.
God said:
"A little season."
And then:
"Rest."
Perhaps the greatest expression of trust is not always continuing to struggle.
Sometimes it is accepting that the next part belongs to God.
We do not know:
When.
But we know:
Until.
We do not know:
How long.
But we know:
Not forever.
We do not control:
The timetable.
But we know: Who does.
God's timing is His own.
And faith does not endure because it knows the date.
Faith endures because it knows the One who holds tomorrow.

Ask Yourself This:

Is there something in my life where God's answer seems to be:
“A little season”?
Have I interpreted God's delay as evidence that He has forgotten me?
Am I trying to carry a timetable that belongs to God?
Can I distinguish between faithfully doing what God has given me to do and trying to control what only God can control?
Is there something I have already placed in God's hands but keep taking back because His timing does not match mine?
And when I have done everything faithfulness requires—
when I have prayed—
when I have waited—
when I still cannot see what God is doing—
can I hear Him say:
You do not have to carry My watch.
Rest.
The story is still moving.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:12

“And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;”
— Revelation 6:12, KJV

The sixth seal opens.
And suddenly:
Everything moves.
The earth shakes.
The sun darkens.
The moon changes.
The imagery that began with horses riding across the earth now expands until:
Earth.
Sun.
Moon.
All become part of the vision.
The scale has changed.
The martyrs asked:
“How long?”
They were told:
“A little season.”
Now the sixth seal opens.
And something begins to happen.
The world that seemed so permanent—
so stable—
so immovable—
begins to shake.
But before John tells us what moves, he tells us again:
Who opened the seal.
The Lamb.
That matters.
Because Revelation is about to show us a creation in upheaval.
And when everything else begins to move:
The throne does not.

1. “When He Had Opened”

Again:
“When he had opened...”
The subject remains the Lamb.
We have heard this repeatedly.

First seal.
Second.
Third.
Fourth.
Fifth.
Now:
Sixth.
The imagery changes dramatically.
The One opening the seals does not.
That repetition has become almost a theological anchor.
Before the earthquake:
The Lamb.
Before the darkened sun:
The Lamb.
Before the moon becomes like blood:
The Lamb.
Before creation appears to come apart:
The Lamb.
Revelation never allows the catastrophe to appear before reminding us who holds the scroll.

2. "The Sixth Seal"

We have reached:
"The sixth seal."
Only one remains.
But Revelation will not move immediately from the sixth to the seventh.
Chapter 7 will intervene.
That pause will matter enormously.
At the end of Chapter 6 comes the question:
"Who shall be able to stand?"
Chapter 7 will address that question before the seventh seal opens.
But we are not there yet.
For now:
The sixth seal begins.
And the imagery becomes larger than anything we have seen among the horsemen.

3. "I Beheld"

John says again:
"I beheld."
He has heard.
He has seen.
He has watched horsemen emerge.
He has seen souls beneath the altar.

Now he looks again.
And what he sees is not another rider.
It is:
Creation itself responding.
That is an enormous shift.
The first four seals involved forces operating within the world.
The sixth seal appears to shake the framework of the world itself.

4. "There Was a Great Earthquake"

The first sign is:
"A great earthquake."
Few experiences communicate instability more immediately than an earthquake.
We trust the ground.
We build upon it.
We stand upon it.
We walk upon it without thinking about whether it will remain beneath our feet.
The earth represents:
Stability.
Then:
It moves.
Something we assumed was immovable suddenly proves otherwise.
That makes the earthquake an extraordinarily powerful image of judgment.
What humanity regarded as stable:
Is shaking.

5. When the Ground Moves

There is something psychologically unsettling about an earthquake.
A storm comes from above.
A flood rises.
A fire approaches.
But an earthquake attacks the assumption beneath everything else:
The ground will hold.
And perhaps that is precisely why the image works so powerfully here.
Human beings construct lives upon things we assume will remain stable.
Power.
Money.
Institutions.
Governments.
Reputation.
Health.
Relationships.

Plans.
Even the physical world around us.
Then something happens.
And the ground moves.
Revelation asks:
What remains when the things we thought could never move—
move?

6. "Great"

John does not describe merely:
An earthquake.
He says:
"A great earthquake."
Revelation frequently uses language of magnitude because the events it portrays are not trivial.
The sixth seal represents a profound disruption of the established order.
Again:
We should not minimize the imagery.
Something enormous is happening.
But neither should we forget the pattern already established.
The sword was:
Great.
Yet:
The throne was greater.
Now the earthquake is:
Great.
And still:
The throne remains.

7. Earthquakes in Biblical Imagery

Throughout Scripture, earthquakes can accompany moments of divine manifestation and judgment.
Creation itself seems to respond to the presence and activity of God.
Mountains tremble.
The earth shakes.
The created order is not portrayed as indifferent to its Creator.
That helps us understand the imagery here.
The sixth seal is not merely a report of geological activity.
The earthquake participates in a larger biblical language of:
Divine intervention.
Judgment.
The shaking of what appeared secure.
John's first readers would not have needed a seismograph to understand the message.

Something foundational is being disturbed.

8. The Earth Shakes, Then the Heavens Change

But the earthquake is only the beginning.
John looks upward.
"The sun became black as sackcloth of hair."
Then:
"The moon became as blood."
The disturbance moves from:
Earth.
To:
Heaven.
The whole visible order seems affected.
Below:
The ground shakes.
Above:
The lights change.
There appears to be nowhere left to look for normalcy.
That is precisely the effect of the vision.
Everything familiar is becoming unfamiliar.

9. "The Sun Became Black"

The sun is one of the most dependable features of human existence.
Morning comes.
The sun rises.
Day follows night.
Human beings have organized life around that rhythm from the beginning.
Now:
"The sun became black."
The source of daylight becomes associated with darkness.
Again, Revelation is taking something humanity regards as dependable and showing it transformed.
The ordinary order no longer appears ordinary.
The message is unmistakable:
The world as humanity knows it cannot simply continue unchanged forever.

10. "As Sackcloth Of Hair"

John says the sun became black:
"As Sackcloth of Hair."
Sackcloth in Scripture is associated with:
Mourning.
Grief.
Repentance.

Lament.
That gives the darkness emotional and spiritual weight.
The sun does not merely become dark.
It appears clothed in:
Mourning.
Creation itself seems to participate in the solemnity of the moment.
The imagery is not merely astronomical.
It is theological.

11. The Light Goes Dark

There is something especially unsettling about light becoming darkness.
Light normally helps us:
See.
Navigate.
Understand where we are.
Darkness removes those assurances.
And perhaps there is another layer of meaning here.
Human beings often imagine they can illuminate their own world.
We understand.
We control.
We know.
Then the sixth seal opens.
And even the sun goes dark.
Human confidence suddenly seems very small.

12. "The Moon"

John then turns to:
"The moon."
The sun is darkened.
The moon changes.
Day and night are both affected.
The two great lights by which humanity marks time appear transformed.
Again:
The whole created order seems caught in the upheaval.
The regular rhythms upon which human beings depend are no longer behaving normally.
The clock of creation itself seems disturbed.

13. "Became As Blood"

The moon became:
"As blood."
Notice John's language.
He does not simply say:
The moon became blood.
He says:

“As blood.”
That is visionary comparison.
John is describing what he sees using language available to him.
And this is another place where careful reading matters.
Revelation does not require us to turn every image into a modern scientific prediction.
John is giving us apocalyptic imagery.
The moon appears:
Bloodlike.
The effect is ominous.
The symbolism communicates:
Judgment.
Violence.
Upheaval.
The ordinary appearance of the heavens has been transformed into something terrifying.

14. Revelation Is Not Asking Us to Become Astronomers

Passages like this have inspired endless attempts to match Revelation with:
Eclipses.
Comets.
Atmospheric events.
Volcanic eruptions.
Wars.
Modern technologies.
Specific dates.
And perhaps some natural phenomena can help us imagine how frightening John's vision would appear.
But Revelation's primary purpose is not to turn disciples into astronomical detectives.
The pastoral question is larger:
What happens to human confidence when everything we assumed was permanent begins to shake?
John wants us to feel:
The instability.
The vulnerability.
The collapse of false security.
And then remember:
The throne.

15. The Prophets Have Spoken This Language Before

John's imagery does not appear from nowhere.

The Old Testament prophets frequently used cosmic language to describe:
The Day of the Lord.
Divine judgment.
The fall of kingdoms.
God's intervention in history.
Darkened sun.
Changed moon.
Shaking heavens.
Moving earth.
These images belong to the prophetic vocabulary John inherited.
That means we should read Revelation with Scripture in one hand rather than the newspaper in the other.
John's world of imagery is deeply:
Biblical.
The prophets taught him how to speak about the day when God confronts human rebellion.

16. Everything We Thought Was Permanent

Perhaps this is where the verse becomes deeply pastoral.
We all have things we quietly assume will remain.
Tomorrow will resemble today.
The people we love will still be here.
Our health will continue.
Our job will remain.
The bank account will be sufficient.
The house will stand.
The plans will work.
Then:
Something moves.
A diagnosis.
A death.
A job loss.
A relationship breaks.
A phone call.
An unexpected crisis.
And suddenly we discover:
The ground can shake.

17. Sometimes God Allows the False Foundations to Shake

Not every hardship should be interpreted as a direct act of divine judgment.
We must be careful about saying that.

Jesus Himself warned against simplistic assumptions connecting particular suffering with particular personal sin.
But Scripture repeatedly teaches that things other than God are ultimately:
Temporary.
And sometimes a shaking reveals what we have been trusting.
We may discover that we built our security upon something that was never capable of carrying the full weight of our lives.
That discovery can hurt.
Sometimes terribly.
But it can also become:
Grace.
Because a false foundation is most dangerous when we never realize it is false.

18. Rock Bottom Revisited

We spoke earlier about:
Rock bottom.
Sometimes things become bleak before they become better.
Sometimes what we believed was solid disappears.
Sometimes we reach a place where there seems to be:
Nothing left.
But perhaps rock bottom teaches us something the mountaintop never could.
When everything else has fallen away:
What remains?
Revelation has been answering that question since Chapter 4.
The throne.
The Lamb.
Worship.
God.
The sixth seal does not introduce those realities.
It tests whether we remember them.

19. What Cannot Be Shaken?

The earth shakes.
The sun darkens.
The moon changes.
And yet there is something John does not tell us.
He does not say:
The throne shook.
He does not say:
The Lamb dropped the scroll.
He does not say:

Heaven panicked.
He does not say:
God lost control.
Creation is disturbed.
God is not.
That contrast may be the theological center of the verse.
The earthquake reveals the difference between what is created and the Creator.
Creation can shake.
The Creator cannot.

20. The Martyrs Asked "How Long?"

We should not forget what immediately preceded this.
The martyrs asked:
"How long?"
They were told:
"Rest yet for a little season."
Then:
The sixth seal opens.
That sequence matters.
God's:
"A little season"
did not mean:
Nothing is happening.
The story was still moving.
The martyrs could not see the timetable.
But the Lamb continued opening the scroll.
Perhaps that is exactly what we need to remember during our own:
"A little season."
God's delay is not:
God's inactivity.
We may be resting beneath the altar, wondering why nothing seems to change.
Meanwhile:
The Lamb is still opening seals.

21. God's Timing Is His Own

We said it at verse 11:
God has His own timing.
Verse 12 demonstrates it.
The martyrs did not determine when the sixth seal opened.
The horsemen did not.
The inhabitants of the earth did not.
The Lamb did.

The timing belonged to Him.
That does not answer every question we have about divine timing.
But it tells us where the timetable rests.
Not:
With us.
Not:
With evil.
Not:
With history.
With:
God.

22. Sometimes the Shaking Is the Beginning of the Answer

The martyrs prayed:
"How long?"
Then:
The earth shook.
We should be cautious about turning that sequence into a universal formula.
But within the vision, the juxtaposition is powerful.
The answer to prayer does not always begin the way we expected.
Sometimes we pray for God to change something.
And when movement finally comes:
It feels like everything is falling apart.
Perhaps what looks like disruption can sometimes be the beginning of:
Transformation.
Before something new can emerge, what falsely appeared permanent may have to be shaken.

23. Do Not Mistake Shaking for Abandonment

When the ground moves beneath us, one of our first spiritual reactions may be:
God has left me.
But Revelation teaches the opposite.
The shaking happens because:
The Lamb opened the seal.
God is not absent from the moment.
The upheaval does not prove heaven has lost control.
It reveals that heaven is acting within the story.
Again, we must not label every personal tragedy as a specific divine action.
But neither should we assume that instability means:
God is absent.
Sometimes faith must say:

I do not understand what is moving.
But I still know:
Who has not moved.

24. The Center Has Not Moved

This has become one of the great refrains of our journey through Revelation.
The center has not moved.
Chapter 4:
The throne.
Chapter 5:
The Lamb.
Chapter 6:
Horsemen.
Martyrs.
Earthquake.
Darkened sun.
Bloodlike moon.
Yet:
The center has not moved.
That is precisely what makes endurance possible.
Faith does not require a motionless world.
Faith requires:
An immovable God.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when life feels like Revelation 6:12.
The ground moves.
The light disappears.
Something we believed would always be there suddenly is not.
And our first instinct may be:
Panic.
But perhaps there is another question worth asking:
What has not moved?
The diagnosis may have changed.
God has not.
The financial situation may have changed.
God has not.
Someone we love may be gone.
God has not.
The future may look completely different from what we planned.
God has not.
That does not make the earthquake painless.
Faith does not pretend the ground is steady when it is shaking.

Faith simply refuses to confuse:
A shaking world—
with:
A shaken God.
Sometimes we do not discover what cannot be shaken until everything we thought could not be shaken begins to move.
And perhaps that is one of the strange graces hidden within rock bottom.
When everything else gives way:
We finally discover what was underneath us all along.

Something Worth Pondering

The earth shook.
The sun became black.
The moon became like blood.
Everything John could see seemed unstable.
Except:
The One he had already seen.
The throne remained.
The Lamb remained.
The scroll remained in His hand.
Perhaps this is why Revelation showed us the throne before it showed us the earthquake.
God wanted John—and us—to know where to look when the ground began moving.
We usually want God to promise:
Nothing will shake.
Revelation gives us a better promise.
When everything shakes:
God will not.
Sometimes we do not discover what cannot be shaken until everything we thought could not be shaken begins to move.
And sometimes the darkness becomes deep enough that we finally begin looking for:
The Light.

Ask Yourself This:

What have I quietly assumed will always remain unchanged?
Have I built my sense of security upon something that can ultimately move?
When circumstances begin to shake, is my first conclusion that God has abandoned me?
Can I distinguish between a world that is unstable and a God who is not?

When God's answer to my prayer begins differently than I expected, can I remain open to the possibility that the story is still moving?
And when the ground beneath everything familiar begins to shake—
when the light seems to disappear—
when I cannot see what happens next—
can I remember:
The earth may shake.
The heavens may change.
But the throne has not moved.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:13

“And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.”
— Revelation 6:13, KJV

Things are becoming desperate.
The earth has shaken.
The sun has become black.
The moon has become like blood.
Now John looks upward again:
“The stars of heaven fell unto the earth.”
The very heavens appear to be coming apart.
And yet John describes this terrifying cosmic scene with something remarkably familiar:
A fig tree.
A strong wind.
Fruit shaken loose from its branches.
Perhaps John had seen it happen many times.
The wind blows.
The branches bend.
And suddenly:
What seemed firmly attached begins to fall.
That is the sixth seal.
Everything humanity assumed was securely fastened to the universe seems to be:
Coming loose.

1. “The Stars of Heaven”

John now turns to:
“The stars of heaven.”
For ancient people, the stars represented some of the most dependable features of creation.
Generation after generation looked upward and saw them.
Empires rose.
Empires fell.
Kings lived.
Kings died.
But:
The stars remained.
They helped people navigate.
They marked seasons.
They seemed almost permanently fixed in the heavens.

And now John sees:
Them falling.
If even the stars can fall, what exactly remains secure?
That is precisely the question the vision seems designed to provoke.

2. "Fell Unto the Earth"

John does not say merely that the stars:
Dimmed.
Disappeared.
Changed.
They:
"Fell Unto the Earth."
The imagery is dramatic.
What belonged above comes crashing below.
The ordered arrangement of creation appears to be breaking apart.
Earth has shaken.
Heaven now seems to be falling.
The distinction between what humanity considered:
Stable above—
and:
Stable below—
is disappearing.
Everything is moving.

3. The Sixth Seal Keeps Expanding

Notice the progression.
First:
The earth.
Then:
The sun.
Then:
The moon.
Now:
The stars.
The vision keeps expanding.
The horsemen moved across the earth.
The sixth seal reaches toward the heavens.
This is no longer simply:
Political instability.
Military conflict.
Economic scarcity.
Human mortality.
The imagery has become:
Cosmic.

John is showing us judgment on a scale large enough to challenge every human assumption about permanence.

4. When Even the Stars Fall

There is something deeply unsettling about stars falling.
The ground beneath us is supposed to remain below.
The stars above us are supposed to remain above.
Those are assumptions so basic that we rarely even think about them.
But now: The ground shakes.
The stars fall.
Everything that once defined:
Up.
Down.
Stable.
Permanent.
Predictable.
appears disrupted.
Sometimes desperation begins when the things we never imagined could change:
Change.

5. "Even As a Fig Tree"

Then John gives us an image almost startling in its simplicity.
A:
Fig tree.
From stars falling out of heaven—
to fruit falling from a tree.
That is characteristic of biblical imagery.
Something enormous is explained through something familiar.
John's readers may never have watched stars fall from heaven.
But they knew what happened when strong winds struck a tree.
They had seen fruit fall.
They knew:
The sound.
The movement.
The suddenness.
The helplessness of fruit once the branch released it.
John takes something unimaginable and says:
It is like that.

6. "Casteth Her Untimely Figs"

The KJV describes:
"Untimely figs."
The KJV's "untimely figs" are unripe figs. John pictures fruit that falls when the tree is violently shaken.

It falls.
Not one piece carefully picked.
Not one piece gently dropping because it has ripened.
The tree is:
Shaken.
And the fruit:
Falls.
The emphasis is not upon harvesting.
It is upon:
Dislodging.
Something that appeared attached is no longer able to hold its place.

7. "When She Is Shaken"

There is that word again:
"Shaken."
Verse 12:
The earth shakes.
Verse 13:
The fig tree is shaken.
The imagery reinforces itself.
Shaking has become the language of the sixth seal.
The question therefore becomes increasingly unavoidable:
What remains when everything that can be shaken begins to shake?
The answer is not yet stated directly in Chapter 6.
But Revelation has already shown it to us.
The throne.
The Lamb.
God.

8. "Of a Mighty Wind"

The tree is shaken:
"Of a Mighty Wind."
Not a gentle breeze.
Not ordinary wind.
A force strong enough to tear loose what had remained attached.
Anyone who has watched a severe storm move through trees understands the image.
Branches bend.
Leaves fly.
Fruit falls.
Sometimes limbs break.
The tree that appeared completely still moments earlier suddenly seems unable to hold anything securely.
John says:

Imagine that.
Now look at the heavens.

9. What Looked Permanent Was Not

Perhaps that is the heart of the image.
The stars looked permanent.
They were not.
The fruit looked attached.
Until:
The wind came.
There are many things in life that seem permanent only because they have never yet encountered the force capable of moving them.
That can be a painful discovery.
We sometimes confuse:
Long-lasting—
with:
Everlasting.
They are not the same.
Something may endure:
Years.
Decades.
Centuries.
And still not be:
Eternal.
Revelation relentlessly directs us away from temporary permanence toward the One who truly is eternal.

10. Human Beings Need Something That Cannot Fall

We need stability.
Something beneath us.
Something above us.
Something we can trust will still be there tomorrow.
And so we build our lives around things that appear dependable.
Careers.
Savings.
Health.
Relationships.
Institutions.
Governments.
Traditions.
Plans.
None of these things is necessarily wrong.
Many are gifts.
But none was designed to carry the weight of:

God.
Eventually every created thing reminds us:
I am not eternal.
The sixth seal simply makes that truth impossible to ignore.

11. The Stars Cannot Save Us

Throughout the ancient world, heavenly bodies could also become objects of religious fascination and worship.
Human beings have repeatedly looked toward creation for powers that belong only to the Creator.
But Revelation leaves no room for that confusion.
The stars themselves:
Fall.
Creation cannot be:
God.
Anything capable of falling from its place cannot be the ultimate foundation of our hope.
Once again Revelation turns our eyes from:
Creation—
toward:
The Creator.

12. Do Not Get Lost Calculating the Stars

This is another verse where interpreters can become fascinated with identifying exactly what physical phenomenon John describes.
Meteors?
Asteroids?
Falling stars?
Symbolic language?
A literal cosmic event?
Those questions can be interesting.
But if they become the center of our reading, we may miss John's larger point.
John is not primarily trying to teach astronomy.
He is communicating:
Apocalyptic upheaval.
The prophetic world is being shaken.
The established order is collapsing before divine judgment.
The pastoral message is not:
Calculate the trajectory.
It is:
Know where to stand.

13. Revelation Is Still Not a Newspaper Puzzle

This matters especially in a book like Revelation.

Every generation is tempted to say:
This must be that event.
That headline must fulfill this verse.
This astronomical phenomenon must be the sign.
But John's imagery comes from the prophetic world of Scripture.
The imagery is intended to reveal theological reality.
God will confront evil.
The present order is not eternal.
Human power is temporary.
Creation itself belongs to God.
Everything opposed to Him will ultimately face:
His judgment.
The purpose is not merely to make us clever about prophecy.
It is to make us:
Faithful.

14. The Stars Fall—but the Throne Does Not

Again we return to the contrast.
Stars:
Fall.
The throne:
Does not.
The earth:
Shakes.
The throne:
Does not.
The sun:
Darkens.
The Lamb:
Does not disappear.
The moon:
Changes.
God:
Does not.
Perhaps John showed us Chapters 4 and 5 first because we would desperately need them by Chapter 6.
Before showing us everything that moves:
He showed us what does not.

15. This Is Why the Order Matters

Imagine beginning Revelation here.
Earthquake.
Black sun.
Bloodlike moon.

Falling stars.
We might conclude:
Chaos rules.
But Revelation did not begin here.
John first showed us:
Christ among His churches.
Then:
The throne.
Then:
The Lamb.
Then:
The scroll.
Then:
Worship.
Only after establishing all of that did he show us:
The horsemen.
Death.
The earthquake.
The falling stars.
The order tells us how to interpret the chaos.
We interpret Chapter 6 through what we learned in Chapters 4 and 5.
Not the other way around.

16. Desperation Changes What We Notice

When life is comfortable, we can easily overlook what actually holds us.
But desperation has a way of stripping away distractions.
When the diagnosis comes:
Priorities change.
When someone dies:
Priorities change.
When the job disappears:
Priorities change.
When everything we planned collapses:
Priorities change.
Things that seemed enormous yesterday can suddenly become very small.
And things we took for granted can become:
Precious.
Desperation can clarify.
Not because desperation is good in itself.
But because desperation sometimes reveals:
What really matters.

17. Sometimes We Have to Reach the Bottom Before We Look Up

There is our earlier conversation again.
Sometimes things become bleak before they become better.
Sometimes people reach:
Rock bottom.
And perhaps one of the tragedies of human nature is how long we can cling to false securities before admitting they cannot save us.
We try:
One more thing.
One more solution.
One more source of control.
Until finally:
There is nothing left to hold.
And then:
We look toward God.
But Revelation 6:13 adds an interesting complication.
Even looking:
Up—
does not help if we are merely looking at:
The stars.
They are falling too.
We must look beyond creation:
To the Creator.

18. When There Is Nowhere Left to Look

Ground:
Shaking.
Sun:
Dark.
Moon:
Bloodlike.
Stars:
Falling.
Where do you look now?
That may be precisely the question John wants us to feel.
Below?
Shaking.
Above?
Falling.
Around us?
Chaos.
Within ourselves?

Fear.
Where then?
Back to:
The throne.
Revelation has already given us the answer before we knew we would need it.

19. Faith Knows Where to Look

We said earlier:
Faith does not always know what happens next.
Faith knows where to look when it does not know what happens next.
Verse 13 brings that truth into sharp focus.
John cannot look toward:
The ground.
The sun.
The moon.
The stars.
for ultimate stability.
Neither can we.
Faith must look beyond what is shaking.
Beyond what is falling.
Beyond what is changing.
Toward:
The One who is not.

20. The Darkness Is Becoming Deep

Things are indeed becoming:
Desperate.
The imagery is becoming:
Bleak.
And we are still not finished.
Verse 14 will intensify it further.
The sky itself will disappear like a scroll being rolled up.
Mountains and islands will move.
Then human beings will begin:
Hiding.
But we should remember what we said earlier:
Sometimes the darkness becomes deep enough that we finally begin looking for:
The Light.
Perhaps the sixth seal exposes the terrible inadequacy of every substitute for God.
When everything else falls:
Only God remains worthy of absolute trust.

21. The Fig Tree Offers an Unexpected Lesson

There is another quiet lesson in John's little fig tree.
The fruit falls because it cannot hold itself against the gale.
Perhaps we sometimes imagine our endurance depends upon:
How tightly we hold on.
Our strength.
Our determination.
Our ability.
But Christian endurance ultimately rests upon something deeper.
Not merely:
How tightly we hold God.
But:
How faithfully God holds us.
The martyrs beneath the altar had already discovered that.
Their earthly lives had been taken.
They could no longer hold anything.
Yet:
God still held them.

22. The Stars May Fall—You Are Still Held

That may be one of the most pastoral truths we can draw from this terrifying verse.
The stars can fall.
The ground can shake.
The familiar can disappear.
Circumstances can become desperate.
And sometimes:
We can feel as though we are falling too.
But the gospel does not ultimately depend upon our ability to keep everything together.
Sometimes:
We cannot.
Sometimes the best we can pray is:
"Lord, hold me."
And perhaps that prayer is enough.
Because the God whose throne does not move is perfectly capable of holding a child whose world does.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when life feels like everything is falling at once.
One problem might be manageable.
Then another comes.
Then another.
And eventually we stop asking:

How do I fix this?
and begin asking:
How much more can I take?
Perhaps that is where Revelation 6:13 meets us.
The stars are falling.
Things have become desperate.
And sometimes desperation exposes something we did not know about ourselves.
We discover how much of our security depended upon things we could lose.
But we may also discover something else.
When everything we were holding begins slipping from our hands:
God has not loosened His grip upon us.
There may come a point when faith is no longer:
"I have this under control."
Faith becomes:
"God, You have me."
And perhaps that is not weaker faith.
Perhaps:
That is deeper faith.

Something Worth Pondering

The stars fell like fruit shaken from a tree.
Everything that appeared securely attached:
Came loose.
And yet: The throne remained.
Perhaps we spend much of life trying to make temporary things permanent.
God invites us to do something better:
Build our lives upon what actually is.
The ground may shake.
The sun may darken.
The moon may change.
The stars may fall.
And sometimes: So may we.
But there is a difference between:
Falling—
and: Being lost.
The stars may fall.
The world may shake.
We may lose our grip.
But God does not lose His.

Ask Yourself This:

What things in my life have I treated as permanent even though they can ultimately change or disappear?
When several difficulties come at once, do I assume that losing control means God has lost control too?
Have I been looking to something created to provide a security only the Creator can provide?
When desperation strips away the things I normally depend upon, do I know where to look?
Can I accept that faith does not always mean holding everything together?
And if the ground shakes—
if the stars fall—
if I finally reach the place where I cannot hold on any tighter—
can I trust this:
I may lose my grip.
But God will never lose His.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:14

“And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”
— Revelation 6:14, KJV

The earth has shaken.
The sun has darkened.
The moon has become like blood.
The stars have fallen.
And now:
The sky disappears.
John describes it with another remarkably familiar image:
A scroll.
The same kind of ordinary object that has stood at the center of the throne-room vision now helps him describe something almost impossible to imagine.
The sky:
“Departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.”
Then John looks again toward the earth.
Mountains move.
Islands move.
Everything that seemed permanently located is:
“Moved out of their places.”
There is almost nothing left in the visible creation to which humanity can point and say:
That will never move.
And perhaps that is exactly the point.
Because Revelation has already shown us:
Something that will not.

1. “The Heaven Departed”

John begins:
“The Heaven Departed.”
That is extraordinary language.
The sky is so constant that we barely think about it.
It is simply:
There.
Morning.
Evening.
Summer.
Winter.
Generation after generation.

People are born beneath it.
They live beneath it.
They die beneath it.
Kingdoms rise beneath it.
Empires fall beneath it.
And the sky remains.
Until: It does not.
The sixth seal has reached beyond disturbances within creation.
The visible framework of creation itself appears to be giving way.

2. When Even the Background Disappears

There are some things in life we notice precisely because they change.
Weather.
Circumstances.
People.
Seasons.
And there are other things we scarcely notice because they seem always to be there.
The sky is almost:
Background.
We notice what happens beneath it.
John now tells us:
Even the background disappears.
That is a powerful picture of complete upheaval.
Nothing can simply be assumed anymore.
Even what seemed too fundamental to question is:
Changing.

3. "As a Scroll"

Then comes John's comparison:
"As a Scroll..."
Once again he describes the unimaginable through the familiar.
His readers knew scrolls.
They knew what happened when tension was released and a scroll rolled inward.
Something stretched open across a broad space could suddenly:
Close.
Disappear.
Be rolled away.
John looks at the sky and says:
It was like that.
The heavens themselves appear to be rolled away.

4. A Scroll Within a Story About a Scroll

There is an interesting resonance here.

We have spent much of Chapters 5 and 6 thinking about:
A scroll.
The scroll in the hand of the One seated upon the throne.
The scroll sealed with seven seals.
The scroll no one could open until:
The Lamb appeared.
Now John uses another scroll image.
But notice the contrast.
The heavenly scroll remains under the Lamb's authority.
The sky itself:
Rolls away.
What God holds remains within His purpose.
What humanity sees as permanent can disappear.
Again:
The Creator and creation are not the same.

5. "When It Is Rolled Together"

The sky does not merely tear.
John says it is like:
"A scroll when it is rolled together."
There is a sense of closure in the image.
Something that had been spread open is being:
Rolled away.
The familiar world is no longer functioning according to the assumptions humanity has taken for granted.
The stage itself seems to be changing.
And that prepares us for what comes next.
Human beings who believed themselves powerful will suddenly realize:
They are not in control of the stage upon which they exercise their power.

6. The World Is Not Eternal

This verse confronts one of humanity's deepest assumptions.
We often live as though the present order is:
Permanent.
Tomorrow will come.
The world will continue.
History will proceed.
Human civilization will endure.
But Revelation insists:
Creation has a Creator.
Therefore creation is not:
God.
The present order had:

A beginning.
And it moves toward:
A completion.
History is going somewhere.
The universe is not simply wandering endlessly without purpose.

7. “Every Mountain”

Then John looks toward:
The mountains.
If we were searching for a symbol of permanence, mountains would be difficult to improve upon.
They tower over generations.
People live and die while mountains remain.
Borders are drawn around them.
Cities are built near them.
Travelers navigate by them.
Mountains appear:
Immovable.
But John says:
“Every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”
The immovable:
Moves.

8. Mountains Are Only Mountains

Perhaps that is worth remembering.
Mountains look enormous from our perspective.
But before the Creator:
They are creation.
We are impressed by their:
Size.
Age.
Strength.
Permanence.
God is not intimidated by any of those things.
What appears enormous to us is still something He made.
Sometimes our problems become:
Mountains.
Our fears become:
Mountains.
Our obstacles become:
Mountains.
And because they tower over us, we begin to imagine they must tower over God too.
They do not.

Mountains are only mountains.
God is still:
God.

9. "And Island"

Then:
"Island."
Mountains represent enormous masses rising above the earth.
Islands represent land surrounded by sea.
Both seem firmly located.
Both become displaced.
John is creating an image in which the geography itself can no longer be trusted.
The landmarks are moving.
The map no longer works.
The places that told people:
You are here—
are no longer where they were.
That is profound disorientation.

10. "Moved Out Of Their Places"

This may be the key phrase:
"Moved out of their places."
Everything had:
A place.
The sun.
The moon.
The stars.
Mountains.
Islands.
Human beings build their sense of order around things remaining:
Where they belong.
But the sixth seal disrupts that confidence.
The stars leave their places.
Mountains leave their places.
Islands leave their places.
Creation appears:
Dislocated.
And when everything else is removed from its place, the question becomes:
Where can humanity stand?
We are approaching the final question of the chapter.
"Who shall be able to stand?"

11. The Question Is Already Forming

Verse 17 has not arrived yet.
But John is preparing us for it.
Think about the progression.
The earth shakes.
The stars fall.
The sky disappears.
Mountains move.
Islands move.
Soon humanity will ask:
"Who shall be able to stand?"
Of course.
Where would you stand when:
Everything beneath you moves?
The physical imagery prepares us for the spiritual question.
Human beings need something more stable than:
Creation.
They need:
The Creator.

12. Every False Refuge Is Being Removed

There is another movement taking place.
The sixth seal is systematically removing:
Refuges.
The earth cannot provide security.
The heavens cannot provide security.
The mountains cannot provide security.
The islands cannot provide security.
And in the next verses, human beings will desperately attempt to find:
Somewhere to hide.
But the vision is exposing the inadequacy of every created refuge.
There is nowhere within creation where humanity can hide from:
The Creator.

13. We Are Very Good at Building Refuges

Human beings have always built places of security.
Some are physical.
Some are emotional.
Some are financial.
Some are political.
Some are relational.
Some are religious.
We tell ourselves:
If I have enough money, I will be safe.

If I have enough influence, I will be safe.
If I know the right people, I will be safe.
If I prepare enough, I will be safe.
If I can control enough, I will be safe.
But eventually Revelation asks:
Safe from what?
There are realities no amount of human security can ultimately prevent.
And there is one encounter no human being can permanently avoid:
Standing before God.

14. Even the Mountains Cannot Hide Us

The irony becomes stronger in the next verses.
The mountains themselves are being moved.
Yet people will soon call upon:
The mountains.
To hide them.
Think about that.
They will seek refuge in something the vision has just shown:
Cannot remain in its own place.
That is what desperation can do.
We cling to the familiar even after the familiar has demonstrated that it cannot save us.
Sometimes we would rather hide behind a moving mountain than surrender to an immovable God.

15. The Collapse of Human Certainty

The sixth seal is not merely about physical catastrophe.
It is also about:
Certainty.
Human beings like to believe:
We understand the world.
We can predict it.
We can manage it.
We can control it.
Then the sky rolls away.
The mountain moves.
The island disappears from where it belonged.
And suddenly our confidence looks very small.
There are moments when the greatest spiritual obstacle between humanity and God is simply:
Our illusion that we do not need Him.
The sixth seal destroys that illusion.

16. Desperation Has Become Complete

We said at verse 13:

Things are becoming desperate.
Now: They are nearly beyond description.
Where do you look?
Down?
The earth shakes.
Up?
The sky disappears.
Toward the horizon?
The mountains move.
Toward the sea?
The islands move.
There is no stable direction left.
Humanity is reaching:
Rock bottom.
But even rock bottom seems to be moving.

17. When Rock Bottom Moves

That is a frightening thought.
Sometimes people say:
"At least things cannot get any worse."
Then:
They do.
What we thought was the bottom turns out not to be.
The last thing we were holding onto:
Moves.
And perhaps there are moments when God allows us to discover that even our final earthly refuge cannot carry the weight we placed upon it.
Not because God delights in our desperation.
But because false security can keep us from seeking:
True security.

18. When There Is Nothing Left But God

There is an old spiritual truth hidden beneath this terrifying imagery.
Sometimes we do not discover that God is enough until:
God is all we have left.
That does not mean we should seek catastrophe.
It does not mean suffering is automatically good.
And it certainly does not mean every loss is directly inflicted by God to teach us a lesson.
But human experience repeatedly shows that loss can expose what prosperity concealed.
When everything else disappears:
We discover what remains.
And Revelation has already told us.

19. The Throne Is Still There

This may be the most important thing verse 14 does not say.
The sky vanished.
But:
The throne did not.
Mountains moved.
But:
The throne did not.
Islands moved.
But:
The throne did not.
The stars fell.
But:
The Lamb did not.
The visible universe seems to be coming apart.
But heaven is not scrambling to restore control.
God never lost it.

20. The Center Has Not Moved

Again:
The center has not moved.
Perhaps by now Revelation wants this truth embedded so deeply within us that no later image can dislodge it.
The horsemen rode.
The center did not move.
The martyrs cried.
The center did not move.
The earth shook.
The center did not move.
The sun darkened.
The center did not move.
The stars fell.
The center did not move.
The sky vanished.
The mountains moved.
The islands moved.
And still:
The center has not moved.

21. The Difference Between Stability and Faith

We often think faith means God will keep our circumstances stable.
Revelation offers something deeper.
Faith is not confidence that:
Nothing will move.

Faith is confidence that:
God will remain when it does.
That distinction changes everything.
If our faith requires circumstances to remain stable, then every earthquake becomes a crisis of belief.
But if our faith rests upon the character of God, then even when circumstances change:
The foundation remains.

22. We Were Never Standing on the Mountain

Perhaps we sometimes misunderstand where our security actually comes from.
We think we stand upon:
The job.
The relationship.
The bank account.
The institution.
The plan.
The diagnosis.
The mountain.
But none of those things ultimately holds us.
They are circumstances within which we live.
They are not:
Our foundation.
The believer's deepest foundation is:
Christ.
And perhaps when the mountain moves, we discover:
We were never truly standing on the mountain.
We were standing on:
Grace.

23. The Sky Can Roll Away Without God Going Anywhere

There is something almost paradoxical about this verse.
The sky disappears.
Yet heaven remains.
That reminds us that biblical heaven is not merely:
The blue space above our heads.
God is not located somewhere behind the clouds as though rolling away the visible sky removes Him.
Creation can change without affecting:
The Creator.
The visible can disappear without touching:
The eternal.

That distinction becomes increasingly important as Revelation moves toward the renewal of all things.

24. Something New Will Eventually Replace What Moves

We should remember where Revelation ultimately goes.
This is not the final picture of creation.
John will eventually see:
A new heaven.
A new earth.
The holy city.
God dwelling with His people.
No more death.
No more mourning.
No more crying.
No more pain.
That means the removal of what presently exists is not the final purpose.
God's story moves toward:
Renewal.
The sixth seal shows:
The old order cannot remain forever.
The end of Revelation will show:
God is making all things new.

25. Sometimes Things Must Move Before Something New Can Come

There is a pastoral truth here worth handling carefully.
Sometimes we desperately ask God to preserve:
What was.
But God may be leading us toward:
What will be.
We resist change because the familiar feels safe.
Even when the familiar is no longer where God intends us to remain.
Again, we should never casually interpret another person's loss as God tearing something away to teach a lesson.
But in our own spiritual lives we may eventually discover:
Some things had to move.
Some doors had to close.
Some plans had to change.
Some assumptions had to fall.
Not because the story was ending.
Because:
Another chapter was beginning.

26. The Lamb Still Holds the Story

This brings us back to where every seal has begun.

The Lamb.
He opened:
The sixth seal.
The sky may roll up like a scroll.
But the scroll that matters most remains:
In His hands.
History has not escaped Him.
Creation has not escaped Him.
Judgment has not escaped Him.
The future has not escaped Him.
And neither have:
We.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when life changes so completely that we no longer recognize the landscape.
The place where we thought we would spend the rest of our lives changes.
The career ends.
The relationship changes.
The family looks different.
The person who was always there is gone.
The future we had carefully imagined disappears.
It can feel as though:
The mountains moved.
And sometimes the hardest part is not merely losing something.
It is losing our sense of:
Where we are.
The map no longer works.
Revelation 6:14 reminds us that when the landmarks move:
God does not.
Perhaps faith sometimes means saying:
"I do not recognize this landscape anymore."
And then adding:
"But I still recognize the One walking with me."
We do not need an unmoving landscape if we have:
An unwavering God.

Something Worth Pondering

The sky vanished.
The mountains moved.
The islands left their places.
Everything that told humanity: "This is where you are"—
became unreliable.

And yet: The throne remained.
Perhaps there comes a point in every life when God must become more than:
One important part of our world.
Because sometimes:
Our world changes.
Then we discover whether God was simply somewhere inside the landscape—
or whether He was:
The foundation beneath it.
The mountain can move.
The island can move.
The sky itself can disappear.
But God does not have to remain in His place.
God is the place in which faith learns to stand.

Ask Yourself This:

What have I treated as an immovable mountain in my life?
Have I confused familiar circumstances with genuine security?
When the landscape of my life changes, do I assume that God must have changed with it?
Am I trying to hide behind something created instead of trusting the Creator?
Can I believe that the loss of what was does not necessarily mean there can be no what will be?
And when the landmarks disappear—
when the map no longer works—
when even rock bottom seems to move—
can I still say:
I may not know where I am.
But I know Who is here.
And the center has not moved.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:15

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;”
— Revelation 6:15, KJV

Now we see the human response.
The earth has shaken.
The sun has darkened.
The moon has become like blood.
The stars have fallen.
The sky has vanished.
Mountains and islands have moved.
And humanity:
Hides.
John begins with:
Kings.
Then magnates.
Generals.
The rich.
The powerful.
Then he reaches everyone else:
Slave.
Free.
Every social distinction remains recognizable.
But none of those distinctions provides:
Security.
The people who once commanded others now run beside them.
The people who possessed wealth discover there are some things money cannot purchase.
The people who commanded armies discover there are some battles armies cannot fight.
The people who exercised power discover there is an authority before which human power becomes:
Very small.
And perhaps that is one of the most sobering revelations of the sixth seal:
Before God, no earthly title becomes a hiding place.

1. “Then”

John begins:
“Then...”

The human response follows the cosmic upheaval.
Creation moves.
Humanity reacts.
Until now, John has primarily shown us:
What happens.
Now he shows us:
What people do about it.
And their response is immediate.
They do not celebrate.
They do not organize.
They do not attempt to repair the sky.
They do not command the mountains to return to their places.
They:
Hide.
The people who believed themselves masters of the world suddenly discover:
They are creatures within it.

2. "The Kings of the Earth"

John begins at the top.
"The kings of the earth."
Kings represent:
Authority.
Government.
Rule.
Command.
They are accustomed to others responding when they speak.
Their decrees carry weight.
Their decisions affect nations.
Their names may appear upon:
Coins.
Buildings.
Monuments.
Laws.
History.
But now:
The kings are hiding.
A crown may distinguish one person from another on earth.
It does not make that person sovereign before:
God.

3. Earthly Thrones Meet the Heavenly Throne

The contrast is striking.
Revelation has already shown us:

A throne in heaven.
Now we meet:
"The kings of the earth."
Earth has many thrones.
Heaven has:
The throne.
Earth has many rulers.
Heaven has:
The One seated upon the throne.
The sixth seal reveals the difference between:
Authority that is temporary—
and:
Authority that is ultimate.
Kings may rule kingdoms.
They do not rule:
Reality.

4. "The Great Men"

Then John names:
"The Great Men."
These are the prominent.
The important.
The influential.
The people whose position gives them access unavailable to others.
Every society has people whose names:
Open doors.
Carry influence.
Command attention.
But the sixth seal reveals something influence cannot accomplish.
Influence may open human doors.
It cannot close:
Heaven.
There comes a point where:
Who you know—
cannot protect you from:
Who God is.

5. "The Chief Captains"

Then:
"The Chief Captains."
These are people accustomed to:
Command.
Strategy.
Weapons.

Armies.
Defense.
If anyone should know how to respond to danger, perhaps:
The generals.
But what military strategy addresses:
A blackened sun?
A bloodlike moon?
Falling stars?
A vanished sky?
Moving mountains?
There are limits to military power.
A general can command soldiers.
A general cannot command:
Creation.

6. When the Sword Cannot Help

This is especially striking after the second seal.
There we saw:
“A great sword.”
Now the generals themselves:
Hide.
The sword that seemed so powerful earlier has become useless.
That is another reversal.
Human violence can appear enormous when directed toward:
Other humans.
But when humanity encounters the sovereignty of God:
The sword suddenly looks very small.
Weapons can intimidate people.
They cannot intimidate:
The throne.

7. “The Rich Men”

Then John names:
“The Rich Men.”
Money is one of humanity's most common sources of security.
Money can provide:
Food.
Shelter.
Healthcare.
Comfort.
Opportunity.
Protection.
Influence.
There is nothing inherently wrong with possessing resources.

But wealth becomes spiritually dangerous when:
Provision becomes trust.
Money can purchase many forms of protection.
But there are some things for which:
There is no price.
The sixth seal is one of them.

8. When Money Cannot Buy Another Door

Imagine the realization.
The wealthy person who has always had:
Another option.
Another property.
Another connection.
Another solution.
Another way out.
Suddenly discovers:
There is no premium shelter from the presence of God.
No first-class cave.
No exclusive mountain.
No amount of money changes what is happening.
The rich hide beside:
Everyone else.
The sixth seal has made wealth irrelevant.

9. "The Mighty Men"

Then:
"The Mighty Men."
Perhaps this category gathers together everyone whose influence gives them control over others.
Political power.
Economic power.
Social power.
Institutional power.
Human beings often spend enormous amounts of life seeking:
Power.
Because power promises:
Control.
If I have enough authority—
enough money—
enough influence—
enough leverage—
then perhaps nothing can happen to me that I cannot manage.
Verse 15 destroys that illusion.
There are realities beyond:

Human control.

10. Power Is Not the Same as Sovereignty

This distinction runs throughout Revelation.
Human beings can possess:
Power.
Only God possesses:
Sovereignty.
Power operates within limits.
Sovereignty establishes the limits.
The first horseman received a crown.
The second was permitted to take peace.
Death and Hades were given authority.
Now the powerful of the earth hide.
Every created authority eventually discovers:
It is created authority.
Only God is:
God.

11. "And Every Bondman And Every Free Man"

Then John widens the picture.
"And Every Bondman and Every Free Man..."
The list is no longer confined to society's elite.
The sixth seal reaches:
Everyone.
The powerful cannot escape.
Neither can:
The powerless.
The wealthy cannot escape.
Neither can:
The poor.
The ruler cannot escape.
Neither can:
The ruled.
Humanity shares something deeper than all its social divisions.
We are all:
Creatures.
And every creature ultimately stands before:
The Creator.

12. "Every Bondman and Every Free Man"

John names one of the deepest social divisions of his world:
"Every Bondman and Every Free Man."
Those categories could determine almost everything about a person's earthly existence.

Freedom.
Opportunity.
Rights.
Status.
Security.
Yet before God:
Neither category provides advantage.
The slave cannot say:
My low position exempts me.
The free person cannot say:
My status protects me.
Earthly society may place enormous distance between two people.
Before the throne:
The distance disappears.

13. The Sixth Seal Levels the Ground

Kings.
Magnates.
Generals.
Rich.
Powerful.
Slave.
Free.
Different lives.
Different privileges.
Different responsibilities.
Different levels of influence.
One response:
They hide.
The sixth seal becomes a great leveling.
All the labels humanity uses to arrange itself suddenly become inadequate.
The king and the slave may have lived worlds apart.
Now: They are looking for the same cave.

14. Death Had Already Leveled the Ground

We saw something similar with the pale horse.
Death is remarkably unimpressed by human status.
Death enters:
Palaces.
Hospitals.
Mansions.
Apartments.
Battlefields.

Farmhouses.
Death does not ask for:
Net worth.
Job title.
Rank.
Education.
Influence.
The fourth horseman already exposed the temporary nature of human distinctions.
Now the sixth seal exposes something deeper.
Every person must ultimately answer to: God.

15. “Hid”

And what does everyone do?
They:
“Hid.”
That word reaches all the way back into humanity's oldest story.
After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden:
They hid.
Human beings have been hiding ever since.
We hide:
Failure.
Shame.
Sin.
Fear.
Weakness.
Wounds.
Motives.
Sometimes from others.
Sometimes from ourselves.
And sometimes we even imagine:
From God.
Revelation 6 shows humanity still attempting the oldest strategy in the Bible.
Hide.

16. From Eden to Revelation

There is something deeply tragic about this connection.
Genesis:
Humanity hides from God.
Revelation:
Humanity still hides from God.
Between those two moments lies the entire story of:
Grace.

Covenant.
Prophets.
Christ.
Cross.
Resurrection.
Gospel.
Invitation.
And still some human beings respond to God by:
Hiding.
The tragedy is not merely that humanity is afraid.
The tragedy is that humanity hides from:
The One who has been seeking us.

17. Fear Makes Us Run the Wrong Direction

When frightened, we instinctively seek:
Shelter.
That makes sense.
But spiritually, fear can make us choose the wrong refuge.
Instead of running:
Toward God—
we run:
From Him.
That is what makes this scene so tragic.
The One seated upon the throne is the only true source of security.
The Lamb is the One who was slaughtered for redemption.
Yet humanity chooses:
A cave.
We sometimes do the same thing.
God becomes the last place we run when He should have been:
The first.

18. "In the Dens"

They hide:
"In the Dens."
A cave offers:
Darkness.
Cover.
Protection.
Concealment.
Human beings have used caves as shelter throughout history.
And under ordinary circumstances:
They can work.
But this is not an ordinary circumstance.
The question is no longer:

Can the cave protect me from weather?
Can it protect me from an enemy?
Can it hide me from another person?
The question is:
Can a cave hide me from:
God?
No.

19. "In the Rocks of the Mountains"

They also hide:
"In the Rocks of the Mountains."
And here the irony becomes almost painful.
Verse 14 just told us:
Every mountain was removed from its place.
Now humanity seeks safety:
Among the mountains.
They are hiding within something the previous verse has already demonstrated:
Can move.
That is the tragedy of false security.
Even after it proves unreliable:
We may still cling to it.

20. Hiding Behind Moving Mountains

There may be no better picture of misplaced trust.
The mountain moved.
And humanity says:
Hide me behind the mountain.
We can do exactly the same thing spiritually.
Money fails us.
We seek:
More money.
Power fails us.
We seek:
More power.
Control fails us.
We try:
More control.
The false refuge demonstrates its weakness.
And instead of turning toward God:
We build a thicker refuge.

21. Why Do We Hide From God?

Perhaps because being fully known frightens us.
God sees:

Everything.
The parts we show.
The parts we hide.
The things we remember.
The things we wish we could forget.
The public self.
The private self.
And sometimes we imagine exposure before God can mean only:
Condemnation.
But Revelation has already shown us something else.
The One at the center is:
The Lamb.
The One before whom humanity hides is the One who was:
Slaughtered.
That makes their choice even more tragic.

22. They Hide From the Lamb Who Came to Save

Verse 16 will make this explicit.
They are terrified of:
"Him That Sitteth on the Throne"
and:
"The wrath of the Lamb."
That phrase is deliberately startling.
But we already know this Lamb.
He is the One whose blood ransomed people:
For God.
The One humanity fears is also the One through whom God has offered:
Redemption.
They hide from the One who came to:
Save.
That may be one of the saddest pictures in the chapter.

23. Judgment Reveals What We Trusted

The sixth seal does not merely punish.
It:
Reveals.
It reveals what humanity trusted.
Kings trusted:
Authority.
Generals trusted:
Force.
The rich trusted:
Wealth.
The powerful trusted:

Influence.
Others trusted:
Whatever refuge they possessed.
Then everything shakes.
And the inadequacy of those trusts becomes visible.
Judgment often reveals truth that comfort allowed us to ignore.

24. Rock Bottom Reveals Our Refuge

We have talked throughout these verses about:
Rock bottom.
Perhaps verse 15 asks another question about it.
When we reach rock bottom:
Where do we run?
Desperation reveals more than weakness.
It can reveal:
Trust.
When everything collapses, our instinctive refuge tells us something about what we really believed could save us.
Some run toward:
God.
Others:
Hide.

25. There Is No Shame in Needing Refuge

The problem in verse 15 is not that these people need:
Refuge.
We all do.
The problem is:
Where they seek it.
Christian faith does not teach:
Be strong enough that you never need shelter.
It teaches:
Know where shelter is.
There is no shame in saying:
I cannot handle this alone.
There is wisdom in knowing:
Where to go when you cannot.

26. The Great Reversal

The scene contains an extraordinary reversal.
Kings:
Hide.
Generals:
Hide.
The powerful:

Hide.
The rich:
Hide.
Meanwhile, beneath the altar:
The martyrs rest.
Think about that.
The people who looked powerful on earth are terrified.
The people who looked defeated on earth are:
At rest.
Earth's winners:
Hide.
Earth's victims:
Wear white robes.
That is Revelation's perspective.
What looked like victory from earth may not have been victory at all.
What looked like defeat may have been:
Faithfulness.

27. The Martyrs Rest While Kings Hide

The contrast deserves to stand by itself.
The martyrs:
Rest.
The kings:
Hide.
Why?
Not because the martyrs were stronger.
Not because they possessed greater earthly resources.
Not because they had better caves.
They knew:
Whom they belonged to.
That is the security Revelation offers.
Not:
A place where judgment cannot find us.
But:
A relationship with the One before whom we do not need to hide.

28. Grace Gives Us Another Place to Run

The gospel offers an alternative to the caves.
When we become aware of:
Sin.
Failure.
Fear.
Mortality.
Judgment.

We can run:
Toward God.
That seems counterintuitive.
But that is grace.
The Judge is also:
The One who provided the Lamb.
We do not need to pretend we are innocent.
We do not need to find a mountain large enough to hide behind.
We come:
Honestly.
Repentantly.
Trustingly.
And discover that the God from whom we wanted to hide is the God who wanted:
To bring us home.

Pastoral Reflection

We all have caves.
Places we go when life becomes frightening.
Some are obvious.
Some look perfectly respectable.
Work can become a cave.
Money can become a cave.
Busyness can become a cave.
Entertainment can become a cave.
Control can become a cave.
Even religion can become a cave if we use religious activity to avoid honestly encountering God.
The question is not whether we ever need refuge.
We do.
The question is:
Where do we hide?
There are moments when everything becomes too much.
And perhaps the most important spiritual instinct we can develop is:
Run toward God.
Not after we have fixed ourselves.
Not after we understand everything.
Not after the fear disappears.
Run toward Him:
Afraid.
Confused.
Ashamed.
Hurting.

Empty-handed.
Because the safest place before God is not:
Hidden from Him.
It is:
Known by Him.

Something Worth Pondering

Kings hid.
Generals hid.
The rich hid.
The powerful hid.
Slave and free hid.
All the things that separated them on earth suddenly meant:
Nothing.
And yet beneath the altar were people who were not hiding at all.
They were:
Resting.
The difference was not:
Power.
Money.
Status.
Influence.
The difference was:
Whom they belonged to.
Perhaps the greatest security faith offers is not that we will always have somewhere on earth to hide.
It is that through Christ:
We no longer need to hide from God.
The mountains may move.
The caves may fail.
The titles may disappear.
The money may become useless.
The power may vanish.
But grace gives us something no earthly refuge can provide:
A God toward whom we can run instead of a God from whom we must hide.

Ask Yourself This:

When life becomes frightening, where do I instinctively run for security?
Have I confused wealth, influence, control, status, or preparation with ultimate safety?

Are there parts of myself I am still attempting to hide from the God who already knows me completely?
When something I trusted proves unreliable, do I turn toward God—or simply search for another version of the same false refuge?
Do I understand that needing refuge is not weakness, but that choosing the right refuge matters?
And when everything else fails—
when the mountains move—
when the caves cannot protect me—
can I remember:
I do not need somewhere to hide from God.
Through the Lamb, I have somewhere to hide in God.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:16

“And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:”
— Revelation 6:16, KJV

They finally speak.
But they do not speak:
To God.
They speak:
To the mountains.
To the rocks.
“Fall on us.”
“Hide us.”
The martyrs beneath the altar cried:
“How long?”
They directed their anguish toward:
God.
Now the frightened inhabitants of the earth also cry out.
But their prayer—if we can call it that—is directed toward:
Creation.
The mountains they trusted are moving.
The rocks cannot save them.
Yet they still cry:
Hide us.
And then John reveals what terrifies them most.
Not merely:
The earthquake.
Not the darkened sun.
Not the bloodlike moon.
Not the falling stars.
Not even the disappearing sky.
They are terrified of:
“The face of him that sitteth on the throne”
and:
“The wrath of the Lamb.”
The deepest terror of the sixth seal is not creation coming apart.
It is humanity realizing:
God is there.

1. “Said to the Mountains and Rocks”

Verse 15 told us where they went.

Verse 16 tells us what they said.
They call:
“To the mountains and rocks.”
There is terrible irony here.
They do not call:
To God.
They call to:
Something God created.
They seek salvation from creation rather than:
The Creator.
The mountains cannot hear.
The rocks cannot answer.
Yet frightened humanity cries toward them anyway.

2. The Martyrs Cried to God

The contrast with verse 10 is remarkable.
The martyrs:
“Cried With a Loud Voice.”
Now the inhabitants of the earth are:
“Calling.”
Both groups cry.
Both groups are distressed.
Both groups want something to change.
But they cry in opposite directions.
The martyrs cry:
Toward God.
The frightened inhabitants cry:
Toward creation.
The martyrs say:
“How long?”
The inhabitants say:
“Fall on us.”
One group wants God to:
Act.
The other wants creation to:
Hide them from God.

3. Desperation Reveals Direction

That may be one of the most important contrasts in the chapter.
Suffering alone does not necessarily tell us where someone will turn.
Both groups suffer.
Both groups cry.
But:
They cry toward different refuges.

Perhaps desperation reveals direction.
When everything else is stripped away:
Where do we turn?
Toward:
God?
Or toward:
Something else?

4. “Fall on Us”

Their request is horrifying.
“Fall on us.”
They would rather be crushed beneath the mountains than:
Face God.
Think about how desperate that is.
The rocks they hoped would protect them are now asked to:
Destroy them.
Shelter has become:
Burial.
The refuge has become:
A tomb.
That is what happens when we demand that creation provide something only the Creator can provide.
Eventually the false refuge cannot:
Save.

5. The Cave Becomes the Grave

Verse 15 showed them entering:
Caves.
Verse 16 shows them asking the rocks:
To fall.
The place chosen for protection becomes the place they are willing to:
Die.
There is something profoundly tragic in that.
A refuge disconnected from God can eventually become:
A prison.
And finally:
A grave.
The cave they chose for safety becomes the grave they choose rather than face God.

6. The Bunker Cannot Solve This Problem

Our earlier observation becomes especially vivid here.
Human beings can build extraordinary shelters.
Deep underground.
Reinforced.

Stocked.
Protected.
Engineered against catastrophe.
And there is nothing inherently wrong with reasonable preparation for danger.
But Revelation is describing something no engineering solution can address.
You can reinforce:
The walls.
You cannot reinforce them against:
God.
You can move deeper underground.
You cannot move:
Outside God's presence.
You can design a shelter against the collapse of civilization.
You cannot design one against:
The Creator.
A bunker may hide us from the world.
It cannot hide us from God.

7. "Hide Us"

That word returns:
"Hide."
Humanity's ancient instinct.
In Eden:
Hide.
At the sixth seal:
Hide.
Sin has always whispered:
Do not go toward God.
Get away.
Cover yourself.
Conceal yourself.
Find somewhere He cannot see.
But Scripture's story repeatedly answers:
There is nowhere.
Not because God is relentlessly searching for someone to destroy.
But because we were created:
To live before His face.

8. "From the Face"

They specifically say:
"Hide us from the face..."
That is striking.

Not merely:
From the power.
Not merely:
From the judgment.
From:
The face.
Throughout Scripture, the face of God can signify:
Presence.
Favor.
Relationship.
Blessing.
Yet here humanity experiences that face as something:
Terrifying.
Why?
The problem is not that God suddenly became:
Evil.
The problem is that those who have resisted Him now encounter the reality of:
His holiness.

9. The Same Presence Can Be Experienced Differently

This is an important theological truth.
The presence of God is: Joy—
to those longing for Him.
But the same holy presence becomes:
Terror—
to those determined to hide from Him.
The difference is not that God possesses two different characters.
God remains:
Holy.
True.
Just.
Loving.
The difference lies in humanity's relationship to Him.
The martyrs long for His intervention.
These inhabitants long to escape His face.

10. “Him That Sitteth on the Throne”

There it is again.
The throne.
We have traveled through:
Horsemen.
War.
Famine.

Death.
Martyrdom.
Earthquake.
Darkness.
Falling stars.
A vanishing sky.
Moving mountains.
And now:
The throne reappears explicitly.
John never allowed us to forget it.
But now even those hiding in caves recognize:
The One seated upon it.
The throne was never merely scenery.
It was the reality behind:
Everything.

11. They Finally See What John Saw First

This is an extraordinary reversal.
John saw:
The throne—
before the seals opened.
These people recognize the throne:
After their world collapses.
John began with:
Worship.
They arrive at:
Terror.
John saw reality from heaven's perspective first.
They discover it only after every competing illusion has been:
Shaken away.
Perhaps that is another purpose of Revelation.
It invites us to see:
Now—
what humanity in verse 16 discovers:
Too late.

12. Revelation Wants Us to See the Throne Before the Earthquake

That may be one of the great pastoral purposes of Chapters 4–6.
See the throne:
Before the ground shakes.
See the Lamb:
Before the horsemen ride.
Learn where the center is:

Before everything around you begins moving.
Because if we wait until catastrophe to decide what is ultimately real:
Fear may overwhelm us.
Faith prepares the heart before:
The earthquake.

13. "And From the Wrath"

Then comes a difficult word:
"Wrath."
Modern Christians sometimes struggle with divine wrath.
We may imagine wrath as:
Uncontrolled rage.
Vindictiveness.
A divine temper tantrum.
But that would be inconsistent with the God Revelation has already shown us.
The One seated upon the throne is:
Holy.
The martyrs called Him:
"Holy and true."
Divine wrath must therefore be understood in relation to:
God's holiness.
God's justice.
God's opposition to evil.
God does not become morally unstable.
God confronts what destroys:
His creation.
His people.
His purposes.

14. Love That Never Opposes Evil Is Not Love

This matters pastorally.
Imagine telling the martyrs beneath the altar:
God loves everyone, therefore He will never confront the evil that slaughtered you.
Would that truly be:
Love?
Love that is indifferent toward cruelty is not:
Holy love.
A God who never opposes:
Violence.
Oppression.
Abuse.
Injustice.

Murder.
would not be morally admirable.
The martyrs asked for justice precisely because they believed God was:
“Holy and true.”
God's judgment means:
Evil does not receive the final word.

15. “The Wrath of the Lamb”

Then comes perhaps the most startling phrase:
“The wrath of the Lamb.”
Those words almost seem contradictory.
Wrath.
Lamb.
We associate a lamb with:
Gentleness.
Vulnerability.
Sacrifice.
And this is not just any lamb.
This is the Lamb John saw:
“As it had been slain.”
The Lamb whose blood ransomed people for God.
The Lamb who conquered through:
Self-giving sacrifice.
And now:
The wrath of the Lamb.

16. Do Not Forget Which Lamb This Is

We cannot interpret:
“The wrath of the Lamb”
while forgetting Chapter 5.
This is the Lamb who:
Was slaughtered.
This is the Lamb who:
Redeemed.
This is the Lamb heaven declared:
Worthy.
The One exercising judgment is the One who has already:
Given Himself.
That changes how we understand the image.
Judgment does not come from a God who remained distant from human suffering.
The Judge bears:
Wounds.

17. The Wounded Judge

That may be one of Revelation's most profound images.
The One who judges evil is also the One who has:
Suffered beneath evil.
The Lamb knows:
Violence.
Injustice.
Rejection.
Humiliation.
Death.
He does not judge suffering from:
A safe distance.
The hands associated with judgment are:
Scarred hands.
The Judge is the Lamb who was slaughtered.

18. The Lamb's Gentleness Is Not Weakness

Sometimes we confuse:
Gentleness—
with:
Weakness.
The Lamb proves otherwise.
Jesus can be:
Merciful—
without being indifferent to evil.
Compassionate—
without calling injustice acceptable.
Forgiving—
without pretending sin does no harm.
The Lamb who offers grace is also the Lamb who will ultimately:
Set things right.
Grace does not mean evil does not matter.
Grace means God has provided a way for sinners to be reconciled to Him.

19. The Tragedy Is That They Hide From the Lamb

Perhaps this is the saddest part.
They are hiding from:
The Lamb.
The One whose very identity proclaims:
Sacrifice.
Redemption.
Grace.
The Lamb was slaughtered.

Why?
Chapter 5 already told us.
To ransom people for:
God.
And now people are asking mountains to crush them rather than face:
That Lamb.
They run from the One who bore wounds to bring humanity home.

20. Grace Refused Becomes Judgment Feared

Revelation holds together two realities we sometimes prefer to separate.
God offers:
Grace.
God also judges:
Evil.
The Lamb embodies both.
The cross itself tells us:
Sin is serious enough to require redemption.
And love is great enough that God provides it.
If we emphasize only judgment:
We distort the Lamb.
If we emphasize grace in a way that makes evil meaningless:
We also distort the Lamb.
At the center stands:
The Lamb who was slaughtered.

21. They Want the Mountain Instead of the Lamb

Consider the choice.
The mountain:
Can move.
The Lamb:
Stands.
The mountain:
Cannot hear.
The Lamb:
Knows them.
The mountain:
Cannot forgive.
The Lamb:
Was slaughtered for redemption.
The mountain:
Can only fall upon them.
The Lamb:
Could reconcile them to God.
And they choose:

The mountain.
That is the tragedy of human rebellion in one picture.

22. False Refuges Become Absurd in the Presence of God

Throughout life, our false refuges can appear reasonable.
Money seems secure.
Power seems secure.
Status seems secure.
Control seems secure.
The bunker seems secure.
The mountain seems secure.
Then God becomes unmistakably present.
And suddenly:
The absurdity is exposed.
We were asking creation to do what only:
God—
could do.

23. The Safest Direction Is Toward God

The martyrs understood something these people did not.
When suffering:
Cry toward God.
When confused:
Cry toward God.
When angry:
Cry toward God.
When frightened:
Cry toward God.
Even when the prayer is:
“How long?”
God can receive:
That prayer.
There is an enormous difference between:
Questioning God while facing Him—
and:
Running from God while hiding from Him.
The martyrs had questions.
But they remained:
Turned toward God.

24. Faith Can Ask Hard Questions Without Running Away

This connects beautifully with verse 10.
The martyrs did not understand:
God's timing.
But they knew:

God's character.
So they asked:
“How long?”
That is faith wrestling:
Toward God.
Verse 16 shows the opposite.
These people do not wrestle with God.
They flee:
From Him.
Perhaps mature faith is not faith that never struggles.
Perhaps mature faith is faith that has learned:
Where to take the struggle.

25. The Face We Were Created to Seek

There is another tragedy in the phrase:
“Hide us from the face...”
Human beings were created for:
God's presence.
Scripture repeatedly portrays the hope of God's people as:
Being with God.
Seeing God.
Dwelling with God.
Receiving His blessing.
Yet sin transforms what should be our greatest joy into:
Our greatest fear.
The gospel works toward restoring what was lost:
Human beings living openly before:
God.
No hiding.
No shame.
No cave.
No fear.

26. Revelation Will Not End in a Cave

This is important.
The story does not end here.
Revelation does not conclude with humanity:
Hiding underground.
It concludes with:
A city.
God dwelling with His people.
The servants of God seeing:
His face.
Think of the contrast.

Chapter 6:
“Hide us from the face.”
Near the end of Revelation:
“They shall see his face.”
That is the direction of redemption.
From:
Hiding from God—
to:
Living before God.

27. From Eden's Hiding to the New Creation's Face

The biblical story can almost be traced through:
The face of God.
Eden:
Humanity hides.
Revelation 6:
Humanity still hides.
New creation:
God's servants see His face.
That is redemption.
God restores what sin destroyed.
The final hope of Scripture is not that humanity finds a better cave.
It is that humanity no longer needs:
One.

Pastoral Reflection

We all know something about hiding.
Perhaps not in literal caves.
But we hide behind:
Success.
Busyness.
Humor.
Money.
Work.
Religion.
Control.
Isolation.
Sometimes we hide because we are afraid of what God will see.
But here is the strange truth of grace:
God already sees.
And still:
The Lamb was slaughtered.
We do not have to hide until we become worthy enough to approach God.

We approach God because:
The Lamb is worthy.
That changes everything.
The people in Revelation 6 cry:
“Hide us.”
The gospel invites us to pray:
“Receive me.”
Those are two entirely different directions.
And perhaps every human heart eventually must choose:
The cave—
or:
The Lamb.

Something Worth Pondering

The martyrs cried:
“How long?”
The inhabitants cried:
“Hide us.”
Both were afraid.
Both were suffering.
Both faced realities beyond their control.
But one group turned:
Toward God.
The other:
Away from God.
Perhaps faith is not measured by whether we ever become frightened.
Perhaps faith is revealed by:
Which direction we run when we are.
The mountain cannot save.
The bunker cannot save.
Wealth cannot save.
Power cannot save.
The cave cannot save.
But the tragedy of verse 16 is that the people hiding already know who sits upon the throne.
And standing beside that throne is:
The Lamb.
They are hiding from the very One who bears the wounds of God's invitation to come home.

Ask Yourself This:

When I am frightened, do I instinctively move toward God or away from Him?
Are there “mountains and rocks” in my life that I expect to provide a security they cannot ultimately give?
Have I ever mistaken God's holiness for evidence that He does not love me?
Can I understand God's judgment as evidence that evil matters rather than imagining that love requires God to ignore it?
When I struggle with God's timing or God's ways, can I bring my questions toward Him rather than using them as reasons to hide from Him?
And when everything else has failed—
when there is no cave deep enough—
no mountain strong enough—
no bunker secure enough—
can I remember:
The safest place is not somewhere God cannot find me.
The safest place is with the Lamb who came looking for me.

A Closer Look — Revelation 6:17

“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”
— Revelation 6:17, KJV

And now:
The question.
After the horsemen.
After conquest.
After war.
After scarcity.
After Death and Hades.
After the martyrs cried:
“How long?”
After they were told:
“A little season.”
After the earth shook.
After the sun became black.
After the moon became like blood.
After the stars fell.
After the sky vanished.
After mountains and islands moved.
After kings, generals, the rich, the powerful, slave and free fled into caves.
After humanity cried:
“Hide us.”
We arrive at:
“Who shall be able to stand?”
It may be one of the most important questions in Revelation.
And John does something remarkable.
He does not immediately answer it.
He ends the chapter.
The question remains suspended before us:
Who is able to stand?

1. “For”

The verse begins:
“For...”
That connects the question directly with the terror of verse 16.
Why are they hiding?
Why are they calling upon mountains and rocks?

Why would they rather be crushed than face the One seated upon the throne?
“For...”
They believe something has arrived.
“The great day.”
The moment they feared can no longer be treated as:
Distant.
Hypothetical.
Irrelevant.
It has:
Come.

2. “The Great Day”

John calls it:
“The great day.”
This language belongs to the biblical prophetic tradition of:
The Day of the Lord.
The prophets repeatedly looked toward the time when God would:
Confront evil.
Judge injustice.
Vindicate His purposes.
Demonstrate His sovereignty.
Set things right.
The sixth seal draws upon that great biblical expectation.
History does not continue forever without:
Accountability.
There comes:
A day.

3. History Has a Destination

That is one of Revelation's fundamental claims.
History is not:
Meaningless repetition.
It is not merely:
One empire replacing another.
One war following another.
One generation replacing another.
One tragedy followed by another.
History moves toward:
God's purposes.
The martyrs asked:
“How long?”
That question only makes sense if history is going:
Somewhere.

Verse 17 tells us:
It is.

4. “Is Come”

Notice the force of:
“Is Come.”
What was anticipated is now experienced.
What seemed distant now feels:
Present.
Human beings are very good at living as though certain realities will always remain:
Later.
Later I will deal with that.
Later I will change.
Later I will reconcile.
Later I will think about God.
Later I will ask the difficult questions.
Later.
But eventually:
Later becomes now.
The inhabitants of the earth suddenly discover:
The day they treated as distant has arrived.

5. The Martyrs Asked “How Long?”

We should hear verse 10 echoing here.
The martyrs asked:
“How long...dost thou not judge...?”
Then God said:
“A little season.”
Now the inhabitants of the earth say:
“The great day...is come.”
The sequence is powerful.
“How long?”
“A little season.”
“Is Come.”
There is the movement of divine timing.
Waiting.
Waiting.
Then:
Arrival.
God's “not yet” never meant:
Never.

6. “A Little Season” Had a Limit

Verse 11 suddenly becomes even more important.

The martyrs were told:
Rest.
“A little season.”
That phrase contained a promise.
The waiting was:
Finite.
The delay had:
A boundary.
The story had:
A destination.
Now the sixth seal reminds us:
God's delays are not permanent postponements of His purposes.
The timetable belongs to Him.
But so does:
The completion.

7. God's Timing Is His Own

We have returned to the truth you identified earlier.
God has:
His own timing.
We frequently want:
Immediate answers.
Immediate justice.
Immediate healing.
Immediate resolution.
God sees something we do not:
The whole story.
The martyrs could see their suffering.
God could see:
The completion.
They knew:
What had happened.
God knew:
What remained.
They knew:
How long they had already waited.
God knew:
When the waiting would end.
Faith lives within that difference.

8. “His Wrath”

John says:
“The great day of his wrath.”

The KJV uses the singular “his.” The preceding verse names the wrath of the Lamb, while also speaking of the face of Him who sits upon the throne.
The One seated upon the throne—
and:
The Lamb.
The singular wording should be heard within that shared scene of divine authority. We should not separate it from everything Revelation has already shown us about them.
The throne represents:
God's sovereignty.
The Lamb represents:
God's redemptive action through Christ.
And now divine judgment is associated with:
Both.
This is not one God of love competing with another figure of judgment.
God's holiness, justice, mercy, and redemption belong within:
One coherent divine purpose.

9. Wrath Is Not God's Loss of Control

Again, we must be careful with the word:
Wrath.
Human wrath is often:
Impulsive.
Vindictive.
Selfish.
Disproportionate.
Out of control.
Divine wrath should not be imagined that way.
Nothing in the throne-room vision suggests:
God has lost control.
Quite the opposite.
The throne has remained:
Steady.
Divine wrath is God's settled opposition to what contradicts His holy purposes.
God's judgment means:
Evil matters.

10. The Martyrs Needed Evil to Matter

Remember the souls beneath the altar.
They had been:
Slaughtered.
Their question was not theoretical.

“How long...dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?”
If God were permanently indifferent toward evil, their blood would ultimately mean:
Nothing.
Their suffering would receive no answer.
Their murderers would face no accountability.
But Revelation refuses that conclusion.
God is:
Holy.
God is:
True.
Therefore evil cannot simply be:
Ignored forever.

11. Judgment Is Frightening Because Evil Is Serious

Modern readers sometimes wish Revelation were less severe.
But perhaps part of our discomfort comes from forgetting how serious evil can become.
Ask:
The victim of violence.
The abused child.
The persecuted believer.
The family of the murdered.
The person crushed beneath oppression.
The refugee driven from home.
whether evil matters.
Justice sounds very different when heard from:
Beneath the altar.
Revelation does not allow us to discuss judgment only from the perspective of those who fear accountability.
It also lets us hear:
The victims.

12. The Lamb Is Still the Lamb

Yet we must not forget:
The Lamb.
The phrase “wrath of the Lamb” remains intentionally startling because the Lamb is:
The slaughtered One.
The Redeemer.
The One whose blood ransomed people for God.
The One who conquered not by slaughtering others but by:
Being slaughtered.

Therefore the One associated with judgment is also the One who has already demonstrated:
Sacrificial love.
The Judge bears:
Wounds.

13. Grace and Judgment Meet in the Lamb

The Lamb prevents us from making two opposite mistakes.
One mistake says:
God judges, therefore God cannot truly love.
The Lamb says:
Look at the wounds.
The other mistake says:
God loves, therefore God cannot truly judge evil.
The martyrs say:
Look at our blood.
Revelation holds both together.
Love is not:
Indifference.
Justice is not:
Cruelty.
At the center stands:
The Lamb.

14. "Who"

Then comes the question:
"Who...?"
Not:
What institution?
What government?
What army?
What bank account?
What cave?
What mountain?
The question is:
Who?
The sixth seal has removed every:
What.
Now the issue becomes:
Who.
Who can stand?

15. Not "What Can Survive?"

This is important.
John does not ask:

What structure can survive?
What empire can survive?
What economic system can survive?
What military can survive?
What shelter can survive?
He asks:
Who?
Revelation is ultimately concerned with:
People.
Relationship.
Faithfulness.
Belonging.
The question is not merely whether civilization survives.
The question is:
Who belongs to God?

16. “Shall Be Able”

“Who shall be able...?”
Human ability has been exposed throughout the chapter.
The king was unable.
The magnate was unable.
The general was unable.
The rich were unable.
The powerful were unable.
Slave and free were unable.
Humanity had tried:
Authority.
Wealth.
Power.
Status.
Shelter.
None answered the question.
The sixth seal has systematically dismantled:
Self-sufficiency.

17. Human Strength Has Reached Its Limit

Perhaps humanity's greatest illusion is:
I can handle it.
Sometimes we can.
We solve problems.
We build.
We repair.
We plan.
We prepare.

We learn.
We adapt.
Those abilities are gifts.
But eventually every human being encounters something beyond:
Human ability.
And Revelation 6 brings humanity to the ultimate limit.
The question is no longer:
How strong are you?
It is:
Can strength save you here?

18. "To Stand"

And then:
"Stand."
What a word after everything we have just witnessed.
The earth:
Shook.
The stars:
Fell.
The sky:
Vanished.
The mountains:
Moved.
The islands:
Moved.
Humanity:
Hid.
And now:
Who can stand?
The physical imagery and spiritual question converge.
How do you stand when everything upon which you thought you were standing:
Moves?

19. Standing Is More Than Remaining Upright

In Scripture, standing can carry deeper significance.
To stand before someone can mean:
To appear before them.
To endure their presence.
To remain.
To be accepted.
To survive judgment.
The question therefore reaches beyond physical balance.
Who can stand:

Before God?
Who can remain when:
False securities disappear?
Who can endure:
The great day?

20. The King Cannot Stand Because He Is King

Verse 15 has already answered one possibility.
Kings cannot stand merely because they are:
Kings.
Titles do not answer:
"Who shall be able to stand?"
Neither does:
Influence.
Military authority.
Wealth.
Power.
Social freedom.
Human distinctions cannot produce the answer.
Whatever enables someone to stand must come from:
Somewhere else.

21. The Bunker Cannot Make Someone Stand

Our conversation about bunkers fits here perfectly.
A bunker may help someone:
Survive a disaster.
But the question in verse 17 is deeper than:
Who can survive underground?
A person can hide in the strongest shelter humanity can construct and still not answer:
"Who shall be able to stand?"
Because the problem is no longer environmental.
It is:
Theological.
The deepest human need is not:
A stronger bunker.
It is:
A right relationship with God.

22. Hiding Is Not Standing

Notice the contrast.
Verse 15:
They hide.
Verse 17:
Who can stand?

Those are opposite postures.
Hiding says:
Keep me away.
Standing says:
I can remain.
Hiding seeks:
Concealment.
Standing requires:
Security.
The inhabitants of the earth have discovered that there is nowhere:
To hide.
Now Revelation asks whether there is any way:
To stand.

23. Do Not Answer Too Quickly

And here we must exercise restraint.
Because John:
Stops.
The chapter ends.
He does not immediately say:
"Here is the answer."
He leaves us with:
The question.
That is deliberate literary tension.
We should allow ourselves to feel it.
Who?
Who can stand?
After everything Chapter 6 has shown us:
Who possibly could?
Turn the page.

24. Chapter 7 Is Not an Interruption

This is why Chapter 7 will be so important.
At first glance, Chapter 7 may seem to interrupt the opening of the seals.
Six seals have opened.
We expect:
The seventh.
Instead:
John pauses.
But perhaps Chapter 7 is not an interruption at all.
Perhaps it is:
An answer.
Chapter 6 asks:
"Who shall be able to stand?"

Before the seventh seal opens, John will be shown:
People.
That placement matters enormously.

25. Let John Answer His Own Question

This is especially important when interpreting Revelation.
We can be tempted to rush ahead with:
Our theological systems.
Our charts.
Our timelines.
Our explanations.
But sometimes the best interpreter of Revelation is:
Revelation.
John asks a question.
Then John continues the vision.
Perhaps we should allow:
John—
to tell us what John means.
That requires patience.
The same kind of patience Revelation asks of:
Faith.

26. The Chapter Ends With a Question Mark

There is something wonderful about that.
After all the dramatic imagery, Chapter 6 does not end with:
An explanation.
It ends with:
A question.
Perhaps that is appropriate.
Because Revelation is not merely giving us information about:
What happens.
It is confronting us personally.
Where do:
You—
stand?
What are:
You—
trusting?
Where do:
You—
run?
Who holds:
You—
when everything else moves?

The question reaches beyond John's vision and enters:
Our lives.

27. The Question Beneath Every Other Question

We spend enormous energy asking:
What will happen?
When will it happen?
How will it happen?
What does this symbol mean?
Who does that rider represent?
What historical event does this resemble?
Those can be legitimate questions.
But Revelation 6 ends with something more important:
Who is able to stand?
Perhaps prophecy has failed us if we can explain every symbol but never allow that question to reach:
Our hearts.

28. Revelation Is About Faithfulness, Not Curiosity

This brings us back to the purpose we established from the beginning of this project.
Revelation was not written merely to satisfy:
Curiosity.
It was written to form:
Faithful disciples.
The question is not simply:
Can I decode Revelation?
The question is:
Can I endure faithfully?
When pressure comes:
Will I remain?
When false powers demand allegiance:
Whom will I worship?
When everything shakes:
Where will I stand?
That is Revelation.

29. “When Faith Must Endure”

And here our title finds another expression.
When Faith Must Endure.
Faith must endure:
When horsemen ride.
When peace disappears.
When bread becomes expensive.
When Death approaches.

When prayers seem unanswered.
When God says:
“A little season.”
When the earth shakes.
When the stars fall.
When mountains move.
When others hide.
And finally:
When faith is asked simply:
Can you stand?

30. But Standing Will Not Mean Standing Alone

We should not answer Chapter 7 before we arrive there.
But neither should we forget everything Revelation has already taught us.
Whatever the answer to:
“Who shall be able to stand?”
it will not be:
The strongest.
The richest.
The most powerful.
The best prepared.
The most influential.
Chapter 6 has already eliminated those answers.
If anyone stands:
It will not be because the ground beneath them was strong enough.
It will be because:
Something—or Someone—stronger holds them.

31. Perhaps That Is Why the Question Must Remain

There is wisdom in letting the question sit.
We do not always need to rush toward:
Resolution.
Sometimes Scripture wants us to remain uncomfortable long enough for the question to do its work.
Who is able to stand?
Let it linger.
Let it challenge:
Our confidence.
Our securities.
Our self-sufficiency.
Our hiding places.
Our assumptions.
Before Revelation gives us the answer:

It makes sure we understand why we need one.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments in life when the question becomes:
How am I still standing?
Perhaps you have been there.
Too much happened.
Too quickly.
The diagnosis came.
Someone died.
The job disappeared.
The relationship broke.
The prayer remained unanswered.
The future changed.
And somehow:
You were still standing.
Maybe not confidently.
Maybe not without tears.
Maybe not without questions.
Maybe barely.
But:
Standing.
And perhaps we sometimes misunderstand why.
We think endurance means:
I was stronger than I realized.
Sometimes perhaps.
But Christian endurance points somewhere deeper.
There are times we remain standing not because:
We held everything together.
But because:
God held us together.
That is an enormous difference.
The sixth seal strips away every illusion that human beings can ultimately secure themselves.
And then asks:
Who can stand?
Perhaps before seeking the answer, we should first admit:
Not by our own strength.

Something Worth Pondering

The martyrs asked:
"How long?"
The frightened inhabitants asked:
"Who shall be able to stand?"

Two questions.
Both unanswered immediately.
And between them stands:
The Lamb.
Perhaps that is where faith often lives.
Between:
The question—
and:
The answer.
We do not know:
How long.
We do not always know:
How we will stand.
But we know:
Who holds the scroll.
So Chapter 6 closes without resolving the tension.
The earth has shaken.
The stars have fallen.
The mountains have moved.
The powerful are hiding.
And one question hangs over everything:
Who is able to stand?
Do not rush past it.
Do not answer it too quickly.
Let Revelation answer:
Revelation.
Turn the page.

Ask Yourself This:

When everything I depend upon is removed, what do I believe will enable me to stand?
Have I mistaken preparation, wealth, influence, knowledge, or personal strength for spiritual security?
When God says, “A little season,” can I trust that His “not yet” will not become “never”?
Do I approach Revelation primarily wanting to know what will happen—or wanting to become the kind of disciple who remains faithful whatever happens?
When my strength fails, can I accept that endurance may depend less upon how tightly I hold God and more upon how faithfully God holds me?

And can I resist the temptation to rush past the question Scripture deliberately leaves before me:
The ground has shaken.
The stars have fallen.
The mountains have moved.
Every false refuge has failed.
Who is able to stand?