

## Study 4 - Revelation 6:1-8:5

# Who Will Stand?

Let's take a minute to revise the story so far. John received his vision for the benefit of Christians about to face intense persecution under oppressive Roman rule. The Romans were a cruel and powerful invading force, who overthrew anyone who stood in their way. The Emperor, or Caesar insisted that his subjects prove their loyalty by bowing down to his statue and worshipping him. Christians refused, maintaining that they followed a heavenly King, Jesus Christ. John's vision has been a timely reminder of the heavenly splendour of the one who died as a sacrificial lamb. In fact, the lamb - now on the throne - is about to open the scroll of God's judgement.

As you read, imagine you have seen your Christian friends put to death for remaining faithful to Jesus; Caesar and his regional governors seem invincible. Will you persevere... or not? What is there to look forward to? Who will win out in the end? It all seems so very unfair. Similar questions face us today.

In chapters 6 and 7, John details the opening of the scroll mentioned in chapter 5. Only the "lamb that was slain" was worthy to open it -now he does so, one seal at a time.

### STRUCTURE

From chapter 6 to chapter 16, the Revelation unfolds in a series of "sevens. First, the seven seals on the scroll are opened. Then there are seven trumpets. Later there are seven bowls of Gods wrath. All three sequences speak about God's judgement.

Readers who take the "**all of history**" or "**all in the future**" view of Revelation assume these events unfold one after the other throughout history, or are about to happen. They then try to identify particular points with events in world history - for example, World War II, the US attack on Iraq, and events in the Soviet Union. Popular Christian books (like Hal Lindsay's "The Late, Great Planet Earth") sell millions of copies, but inevitably get it wrong!

There are some good reasons for thinking this is not the approach we're meant to take. Some commentators suggest that the three sequences of seven are parallel descriptions of life in the world under God's judgement. There are certainly some parallel verses... each cycle ends with a sense of final victory for God's people.

1. Compare Rev 8:5 with 11:19 and 16:18. What are the similarities?
2. Compare Rev 6: 17; 11:15 and 16: 17. What "tone" do you get in each?

Maybe each series of seven events refer to the "nature of things" between now and God's final victory? Turn on the TV, and there's no doubt that the calamities John speaks about a part of. The things that take place are typical of our time. Military conquests, wars, famines, and disasters-and part of human existence as we wait for a better heavenly place. But the pressing problem is, so many Christians are caught up in the crossfire. In fact, so much of the violence seems to be unfairly aimed at them... especially if you're a Christian in the Roman Empire.



## Read chapter 6 ...

1. What do each of the first four seals represent? Do you think the end of verse 8 gives any clues about the sort of application first century Christians would have found here?
2. Why had the "souls under the altar " in 6: 9 been slain? How do they fit in to John's aim in recording the vision (see Chapter 1) and his own situation?
3. In chapter 6, What happens to the mighty Kings and Princes who so terrorised the first Christians?

**Read the account below of Germanicus and Quintus. Both of these ancient Christians were literally "thrown to the lions" under Roman rule.** How do you feel about what is happening to them?

Again, stepping back from the details of chapter 6, imagine you wanted to say something to Germanicus in plain language. How does Revelation 6 help?



**Read Revelation 7:1-8:5.**

What "plain language reassurance" is there in 7:3?

This is a chapter rich in symbolic language. There's the famous crowd of 144,000 (a major feature in Jehovah's Witness thinking) - which really just seems to represent a perfect number of "faithful Jewish Christians." Our major interest as Gentile Christians should be the other crowd, dressed in white... and we're told what brand of washing powder they used to get them clean.

Who is "the multitude" and what are they doing?

How did they get here?

How are their clothes "made white"?

Again, what re-assurance is there in this vision for suffering Christians?

**A Summary...**

"The four riders on different horses are doing their work here and now. We live in a world where might is right, where people kill each other, where many are starving, and death reigns. This is how life is... right now. We empathise with the cries of the souls beneath the altar: how long O Lord, before you bring judgement on this wrongdoing? ... When the sixth seal is finally opened, and "the great day of wrath" has finally come, how wonderful it will be to wear the white robe washed in the blood of the lamb... part of the great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages!"

Greg Clarke, "The Vision Statement"

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16 Never again will they hunger;  
never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat upon them,  
nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;  
he will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

