

## Revelation Chapter 6

In our study of St. John's Apocalypse, we now turn to the opening of the 7 seals by the slain Lamb of God, the Resurrected Jesus Christ, Who is the only one worthy to open them.



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The first horseman of the Apocalypse:

**Revelation 6:1** *And I saw when [that] the Lamb opened one of the [7] seals, and I heard, as it were the noise [a voice] of thunder, one of the four beasts [living creatures] saying, Come ~~and see~~. 2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat [the one sitting] on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.*

The voice of thunder is thought to come from the living creature (the one with the face of lion) i.e., the thunderous roar of a lion. The living creature says *Come*, not *Come and see* as the KJV text reads. That would imply the living creature was speaking to St. John. But in the text of the True Orthodox Church, the living creature says *Come*, implying a beckoning call to the 1st horseman of the Apocalypse, the rider on a white horse.

What does the white horse symbolize?

Arch. Athanasios: “This white horse symbolizes victory, triumph, the crown, and the Kingdom.”  
The Venerable Bede, *On the Tabernacle*, I.4.25.11: “Surely the white horse is the Church;”

Who is this rider on the white horse? In American cowboy movies and shows, the hero often rides a white horse or wears a white hat. So it is here, “We have a champion, the Lord.”

One of the great prophecies of Christ’s victory over His enemies, Psalm 44:3-5, gives us a clue: *Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Mighty One, in Thy comeliness and Thy beauty. And bend Thy bow, and proceed prosperously, and be king, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and the right hand shall guide Thee wondrously.*

Our great 2nd century AD Patristic Father, St. Irenæus of Lyons, declares in his *Against Heresies, Bk. IV, XXI, 3*: “For to this end was the Lord born, the type of whose birth he set forth beforehand, of whom also John says in the Apocalypse: *He went forth conquering, that He should conquer.*”

The Venerable Bede writes: “the Rider who was commanding it is the Lord; He had a bow because He was coming to make war against the powers of the air; and a crown of victory was given to Him because by dying He overthrew the reign of death.”

And not just the Lord alone, but those who follow in His footsteps:

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “And so we understand the loosing of the first seal to signify the generation of the apostles. For, as though it were a bow; they stretched forth the gospel message against the demons and led to Christ those wounded by the arrows of salvation. And because they conquered the leader of deceit through the truth, they received a crown.”

Archimandrite Athanasios: St. John the Evangelist writes (1 John 5:4-5): *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the*

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*world, even our faith. 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

“If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then you overcome the world. You are also a victor, You are also a horseman on a white horse and are coming out and being victorious ...it is all those who believed in the name of Jesus Christ ... The first victory is the spreading of the gospel and the return of the world to God.

“The apostles had to fight the demons, the opposing powers, so that the gospel could prevail upon the earth ... They went out and preached with the Lord helping and certifying the word through the signs [miracles] that followed ... This is the victory. They went out conquering. Truly, the spreading of Christianity throughout the then-known world was a colossal and triumphant victory. St. Irenæus notes that during the second half of the second century that the Church had spread all over the earth, in Germany, Siberia, the south, the east, Egypt, Libya, and in the middle of the world. The Church had spread everywhere.”

Marco Polo even documented 3 of the 70 lesser Apostles arrived in Manzi (southeastern China) and established a 1st century Orthodox Christian community that by the end of the 13th century AD, numbered some 700,000 families. He even had them enrolled in the Royal Archives of the Emperor Kublai Khan of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty c. AD 1292 as Christians and not as idolators.<sup>1</sup>

The second horseman of the Apocalypse:

***Revelation 6:3*** *And when He had opened the second seal, [the second one], I heard the second beast [living creature] say, Come ~~and see~~. 4 And there went out another horse that was [bright] red [or flame-colored] and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from [out of] the earth, and that they should kill [slay] one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.*

In answer to the call to *come* from the second living creature (the one with the face like a calf) a rider on a fiery-red/bright-red/blood red horse comes forth, who is granted by God the power to take *peace out of the earth* resulting in mankind to *slay one another*, i.e., resulting in great bloodshed. This second rider, symbolizing “**war**”, shows how utter depraved fallen man is. God does not have to incite men to fight one another. He simply orders this rider to take away the conditions of peace. In a fallen, sinful world, wars arise constantly, but there are still God-given restraints on man’s wickedness. However, here, God is allowing those restraints to be removed, so that they don’t just kill, but slay, a word connoting a much more passionate, bloodthirsty, and vicious component. The *great sword* the rider is carrying is indicative of this immanent and immense slaughter.

Archimandrite Athanasios writes, “This unusual bloodthirsty animosity is a characteristic of civil wars and wars between neighboring nations. The phrase *so that they should slay one*

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1. Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Penguin Books, London, England, 1958, pp. 235-7.N. Note: China was called *Cathay*, S. China *Mangi*. However, the name *Manzi* often appears in documents/maps of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, which was the name of the location of the primitive Orthodox community Marco Polo visited.

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*another* points to the proximity between the peoples, and it most likely refers to gruesome civil wars where passions run very high and deep ... There is nothing more dreadful than this type of war.”

The Jewish War leading up to Titus’ siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 which resulted in its total destruction along with the Jewish Temple, was one such war, a gruesome war as described by Flavius Josephus in his eyewitness accounts. In our own day we see the Islamic jihadist armies in many countries such as Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Nigeria, and most recently in Syria, display this same bloodthirstiness against Kurds, Yazidis, Syriac Christians, and against one another if they align with a different sect Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Druze, or tribal militia.

Archbishop Averky (*Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, Volume III, The Epistles and the Apocalypse*, Holy Trinity Seminary Press, Jordanville, NY, 2018, p. 265) reflecting the alternative opinion of St. Andrew of Caesarea writes: “The taking away of the second seal and the appearance of the red horse, to the one sitting upon it, to which *power was given to take peace from the earth*, signifies the arousal of the unbelievers against the believers when peace was destroyed by the preaching of the Gospel in the fulfillment of the words of Christ: *I have not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword (Mt 10:34)*; and then the earth was abundantly watered by the blood of the confessors and martyrs for Christ. The *red horse* is symbolic either of the shedding of blood or of the heartfelt zeal of those who suffer for Christ.” Here, the living creature is the one with the face of a calf, a sacrificial animal.

Archimandrite Athanasios amplifies this idea: “With the spreading of the gospel after Pentecost, the waves of persecution immediately began as a natural consequence of a world that generally opposes the teaching of the gospel. The Lord said, *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations* (Matt 24:14). How are we to grasp this? The gospel will be preached throughout the entire world, to all the nations as a *martyria*, as a testimony. *Martyria* alludes to the message being preached but not necessarily believed ... [Indeed, there are areas of the world that have been quite resistant to the Gospel.] The Lord questioned whether He would *find [the] faith* when He returns (Luke 18:8) ... When the Son of Man comes back, He will not find the faith that He taught on earth. He will only find a few believers. The remnant, as Saint Paul says, will be present. This proves that the gospel will be preached as a witness whether people accept it or not. yet, because of this witness, people who reject the gospel will be without excuse ... a natural consequence of the absence of the gospel will be the continuation of bloody wars” even among the so-called “Christian nations because they will only hold onto certain points of the Christian gospel.

“The white horse is continually emerging, as we understood during the opening of the first seal. This is interpreted as the constant preaching of the gospel all over the world. The gospel is always being preached on earth. In this context, we must realize that the red horse will also always be emerging and it will always follow the white horse as persecution always follows the preaching of the gospel ... [This is an example of the cyclic interpretation of the visions of Revelation. It is not a lineal history being presented in these visions, but a repetitive cycle.] ... Here, when the second seal is opened and a great sword is given to the rider, this sword, which is symbolic of war, refers to the people who oppose Christ. Unbelievers use the sword

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against Christians, Christ, and His Church, and Christ chooses not to restrict their free will. This allotment of Christian martyrdom takes on the evangelical expression that Christ came to earth to bring a sword and not peace. In other words, His presence removed peace from the earth because people refused to repent and transform their demonic passions as a prerequisite of the peace of the gospel.”

The third horseman of the Apocalypse:

**Revelation 6:5** *And when he had opened the third seal,[the third one] I heard the third beast [living creature] say, Come ~~and see~~. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat [the one sitting] on him had a pair of balances in his hand. 6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the beasts [living creatures] say, A measure [a day’s amount, roughly 1.5-2.0 pints ] of wheat for a penny [denarius], and three measures of barley for a penny [denarius]; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.*

Archimandrite Athanasios: “So when the third seal was opened, a black horse came forth. The third living creature, having a face like a man, tells the rider of this black horse, *Come!* which means do not hold back; go forth with your mission. This rider holds a scale in his hands. The black horse symbolizes mourning, gloom, and deep sadness. This gloom is caused by the plague that this rider will bring upon the entire earth. The scale symbolizes hunger and the lack of food that will cause the cost of bread to skyrocket. The scale shows that the food supply will be so limited that it will be rationed.” In Jesus’ parable of the workers of the vineyard, they were paid the daily wage of 1 denarius. “So the daily pay rate was a denarius. According to the prophecy of this seal, one quart of wheat will cost one denarius, or one day’s wages, and with the same money one can bring home 3 quarts of barley. But, there is also a restriction on the quantity that can be purchased. The balance, or scale, held by the rider expresses the reality of rationing ... [although the rider is instructed to spare the oil and the wine.]

“It is common knowledge that wheat, or bread, oil and wine are three basic representative of human nutrition. That is why during the service of the *Artoklasia* (Ἀρτοκλασία) or the blessing of the five loaves of bread during feast days - along with the loaves of bread, there are also flasks of oil and wine on the table because these three products are the representative elements of human nutrition. By blessing these items during the *Artoklasia* service, we pray to God that we will always have the food necessary for our sustenance. We ask God to bless these items so that they can be plentiful in our homes, and to bless those who have requested that this service be celebrated on a particular feast day, so their pantries are full.”

Victorinus (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.vi.ii.vi.html>) : “Hurt not the wine and the oil.”] That is, strike not the spiritual man with thy inflictions. This is the black horse.”



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The fourth horseman of the Apocalypse:

**Revelation 6:7** *And when he had opened the fourth seal, [the fourth one], I heard the voice of the fourth beast [living creatures] say, Come and see. 8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was [the] Death, and Hell [the Hades] followed with him. And power was given unto them [him] over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.*



Averký: “The taking away of the fourth seal and the appearance of the pale horse with its rider whose name is Death signifies the manifestations of the wrath of God in revenge for the pious and the punishment of sinners. These are the various misfortunes of the last times prophesied by Christ the Saviour (Matt. 24:6-7).”

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “The high flight and the swooping fall upon its prey of the fourth living creature, the eagle, indicates that the wounds come from above from the wrath of God for the revenge of the pious and the punishment of the impious, if only these latter will not be converted through correction to the better.”

Archimandrite. Athanasios:”The color of the fourth horse is pale, that is yellow-green, or ash yellow. This is the color of death ... Hades is personified here, just as Death is also

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personified. It is natural for Hades to follow Death. This verse reveals strong proof that after death souls continue to live. If souls did not live after death, why would Hades be presented here as following close behind Death, as the one who gathers those who have died thus making them his possession or property? This means that souls do not die, but that the life of each mortal human continues even after death.

“*And power [authority] was given to them.* To whom was this authority given. It was given Death first and then to Hades. Christ, Who is the Lord of life and of death, granted this authority;” out of concession for our free will.

“The result of the opening of the fourth seal is the four plagues: war, pestilence, famine, and the beasts of the earth.”

Such cycles have happened over and over again in the last 2000 years. As St. Matthew 24:7 says *Nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and pestilences and these are the beginning of sorrows.* Nevertheless, we are not to lose heart. Remember, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who is in control of all of this. The 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse come forth one by one only when beckoned by one of the living creatures, one of those before God’s throne, and only with His consent.

As for us, we are to continue in our faith, our worship, and our witness, i.e., to be faithful to Christ our Lord, to the end regardless of what befalls the world and us -- to hold on to what we have, our precious True Orthodox faith.

**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 [of the Lamb] which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true [the Holy One and the True One], dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And white robes [a white robe] were [was] given unto every [each] one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*

Revelation 6:9. in the KJV reads: *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:* The Greek text of the Orthodox Church reads **καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τοῦ ἁρνίου ἣν εἶχον** *and for the testimony of the lamb which they held.* The KJV and many English translations do not have the phrase *of the lamb*, others have *of Jesus Christ*. The commentary of Œcumenius uses the same defective text as the KJV here, so Œcumenius considered these martyrs to be those of the Old Testament. However, it is obvious with the correct text, that the martyrs are those from the New Testament Church since they were slain for their testimony of the Lamb.

Archbishop Averky: “The taking away of the fifth seal reveals the prayer of the holy martyrs at the throne of God for the hastening of the end of the world and the coming of the Last Judgment. The **souls of the righteous who have suffered for Christ**, as is evident from this

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passage, **are under the altar of the heavenly temple**, just as on earth from the time of the martyrs there entered the custom of placing in the foundations of Christian temples and altars particles of the relics of the holy martyrs. The prayer of the righteous ones is explained, of course, not by a desire for any personal revenge, but by a desire for the speeding up of God's righteousness on earth and His rewarding of each according to his works, which is to occur at the Last Judgment and will make them participants of eternal blessedness since they have given their lives for Christ and His Divine teaching. To them are given white garments, a symbol of their virtue, and it is told them to endure *yet for a little season* until their fellow laborers, and the brethren who will be killed just as they were, shall fill up the numbers so that all might receive the worthy reward from God."



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Archimandrite Athanasios: “ ... The souls of those who martyred for Christ are under the heavenly altar. Thus, we observe that all those who die in the present world live as souls in a

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specific area before the Second Coming of Christ. If they are saved, they live under the throne of Christ, where the altar is found. This is such a powerful verse concerning the soul and its life after death. It is such a very powerful verse because we learn that when man dies, he does not become zero. He does not simply vanish. We learn that his soul live on in a designated area. Now, one may ask why the souls of the martyrs are under the altar. Initially, the altar relates to their sacrifice. Since they had died as martyrs, the altar and the death of martyrs is intertwined.

“In addition, on the earthly altars of the Old Testament, when the sacrificial animals were slaughtered, the blood ran down to the base. The blood ran through a small channel to the base of the altar. Blood is the carrier or vehicle of life; and the soul, which is also called life, is the carrier of life. As the blood was at the lowest place of the earthly altar in the Old Testament, so the souls in the Evangelist’s vision are under the altar, at the bottom. This truly is a very beautiful and most accurate image.

“Another facet of this is that every faithful person is an offering, a sacrificial being without necessarily having to shed blood in martyrdom. Indeed, from the moment a man joins the ranks of the faithful, he turns into a person of sacrifice. Do not forget this. This is why I have stressed repeatedly that the nature of the gospel is an ascetic one. Orthodoxy is ascetic in character. This is why Saint Paul says, *Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is your logical [reasonable] worship* (Romans 12:1). From the moment I accept the Holy Triune God I become an offering. Offering means a sacrificial being. Therefore, I become an offering and I am placed on top of the noetic and heavenly altar as an offering pleasing to God. **Now, if we do not live this reality, then we have not sacrificed anything of ourselves and have yet to become Christians.** So, Christians who do not have the spirit of sacrifice will not be found under the altar like the other martyrs ...

“There is yet another example which we can see in the life of the Church. For those of you who have attended the consecration of a Church, you will have noted that the altar is bare. During the consecration service, the bishop (and all the priests and faithful in attendance) celebrating the consecration makes three processions around the church building, holding the holy paten (*diskarion*) upon which the relics of three saints have been placed. This is the same paten that our priest hold when they come out of the altar for the Great Entrance. The relics are then placed in a small silver or gold box, which is [positioned and sealed with a special beeswax/myrrh mixture within a special cavity in the column or columns (legs) of the altar (or the altar top). It is on this altar, this holy table, that the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist is celebrated ... So here again we see that our holy altars are exact duplicates of the heavenly altar. ... To those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, there are astounding similarities between Revelation and Orthodox worship. It is clear that we do not move arbitrarily in our worship. We are firmly grounded in Scripture ...

“There is another subtle point that needs to be made on this topic. The souls of the martyrs are beneath the heavenly altar ... Their bodies have been left on earth, but their souls have departed. Moreover, the holy incorporeal beings, the holy angels and archangels accompany the souls of the saints. This is obvious in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus whose soul was taken by angels and transferred to heaven. So, in heaven, we only have souls. The bodies of all those who departed are still here on earth. This means that the martyrs are not



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found within the heavenly realm, but beneath the heavenly scene, or stage in St. John's vision ... This means that the martyrs are not in the Kingdom of God. They are in paradise. Therefore, the Kingdom of God differs from paradise in the sense that paradise is the area of souls. The Kingdom of God is the area reserved for all human beings, all of mankind. When the resurrection of the dead takes place and the souls become united with their bodies, only then will they enter the Kingdom of God. They will be on top of the stage, in the scene, and not beneath it. I say this so that you stay informed about this subtle differentiation between paradise and the Kingdom of God." -- Archimandrite Athanasios, *Lesson 31 Revelation 6:9-11, Revelation: The Seven Seals, Volume II*, Zoe Press, Dunlop, CA, 2013, pp. 125-131.

*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 [whole] moon became as blood; 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. 14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*



Not a typical earthquake, but a cataclysmic earthquake that not only affects the earth but the heavens as well. The unmistakable power of the hand of God is at work here. There is cataclysmic upheaval throughout the whole created universe with darkening of the sun, resulting in the full moon/whole moon not giving its light because the source of its light, the sun, has

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itself been darkened. Moreover, the stars fall from the heavens even as figs fall from a fig tree in a mighty wind or earthquake. Although some interpret this in an allegorical fashion, where the sun, the moon, and the stars are the great and powerful of the earth, and these fall from their positions of power and wealth. But the detail here and in the Gospels and the Prophets point to the reality of an alteration of the universe, its preparing for its transformation from corruption into a new heaven and a new earth at the time of the Second Coming of Christ and the Great Judgment.

Moreover, these very signs are those which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself prophesied not long before His suffering on the Cross:

*St. Matthew 24:29. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

*St. Luke 21:25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; 26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. 27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

But long before the Apostles, the prophet Haggai announced similar things as well:

*Haggai 2:20-22: The word of the Lord came to Haggai the prophet on the 24th day of the month in these terms. Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, of the tribe of Judah, thus: I shall once and for all shake heaven and earth, sea and dry land. I shall overthrow kings' thrones, destroy the power of kings of nations, overturn chariots and riders, and horses, and their riders will each fall on the sword of his brother.*

St. Peter goes even further in details in his second letter 2 Peter 3:10: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.*

There is no room for allegory here.

Archbishop Averky: "These signs will evoke mortal fear and terror among people of all conditions who will live then on the earth, beginning with kings, nobles, and generals, and ending with slaves." -- i.e., the worldly, the ungodly, and those in rebellion against the Lord!

*Revelation 6:15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the*

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*chief captains [the chiliarchs and the richmen], and the mighty men [the strong], and every bondman, and ~~every~~ free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 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: 17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*





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Such images of great destruction and terror with signs in the heavens and on the earth are not rare in Scripture. The Old Testament Prophets often used such language and imagery to chastise and threaten Israel and Judah to turn from their wicked ways and return to the Lord before He pours out His wrath upon them for their unfaithfulness and sin. E.g. *Is.2; 13; 34, Ez 32:7; Joel 2:30-1*. But here it is on a much greater scale that such horrors will overtake the whole of mankind before the end of the world. Much of the rest the Apocalypse will deal with this.

But for the righteous:

*St. Matthew 24:131 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

*St. Paul 1 Thess 4:17: Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*