

# WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?

Part 37 of Foundations 260. Revelation 6:1-17.

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. November 9, 2025.

## Dismiss the Middle School

### WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?

#### Is the world getting worse?

I'm sort of a pessimistic optimist. I see a lot of good stuff in the world, and at the same time, I know a lot of ugly things are going on.

I know that the gospel is advancing, many are coming to faith in Jesus, and churches are growing around the world.

I also know that in the Western world, paganism and unbelief are rising, church attendance is declining, and the ethical, moral, and spiritual commitments that once held us together have lapsed.

**So, my question is, what in the world is going on?** Should we feel optimistic or pessimistic?

In our Foundations 260 readings last week, we read Revelation 6-10, which answered my questions. So ... let's dive in.

# INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION 6

**Today's teaching focuses on Revelation 6.** Before we go into details, we should understand the background of the passage.

## **The Book of Revelation.**

- Written by: The apostle John.
- Written to: Seven churches in Asia Minor, though its message is relevant to every Christian.
- Written for: Christians who were under pressure to give up on Jesus. They needed to know that God was in control, that evil was being judged, and their faithfulness would pay off in the new creation. That message is still relevant today.
- Written how: The book contains a series of visions given to John by Jesus. It uses dramatic imagery and symbolism designed to spark our imaginations. Many passages reflect scenes in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and other Old Testament books.

## **Revelation, Chapter Six and the Seven Seals**

**To understand Revelation, Chapter Six**, we need to remember what happened in Chapter Five. The risen and exalted Lord Jesus took the scroll, a rolled-up document.

- **Contents:** This scroll contains God's plans for salvation and judgment.
- **Seven seals:** The scroll was sealed with seven seals. Seven is a symbolic number that represents perfection or completeness. The scroll contains God's plan, which is complete and perfect. It's the best plan, the right plan.
- **Sealed:** The scroll is sealed so its contents cannot be altered. God's plans cannot be changed. They are sure to take place.
- So, in the vision, Jesus takes the scroll and begins to open its seals (6:1–8:5).

**OK. That's the background.** Now, we're ready to dive into Chapter Six to find the answer to the question: What in the world is going on?

**Let's read it now.**

# REVELATION 6:1-17

## The First Seal on the Scroll

1 Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come! ” 2 I looked, and there was a white horse. Its rider held a bow; a crown was given to him, and he went out as a conqueror in order to conquer.

## The Second Seal

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come! ” 4 Then another horse went out, a fiery red one, and its rider was allowed to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another. And a large sword was given to him.

## The Third Seal

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come! ” And I looked, and there was a black horse. Its rider held a set of scales in his hand. 6 Then I heard something like a voice among the four living creatures say, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not harm the oil and the wine.”

## The Fourth Seal

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come! ” 8 And I looked, and there was a pale green horse. Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following after him. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill by the sword, by famine, by plague, and by the wild animals of the earth.

## **The Fifth Seal**

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, the one who is holy and true, how long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood? ” 11 So they were each given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters, who were going to be killed just as they had been.

## **The Sixth Seal**

12 Then I saw him open the sixth seal. A violent earthquake occurred; the sun turned black like sackcloth made of hair; the entire moon became like blood; 13 the stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind; 14 the sky was split apart like a scroll being rolled up; and every mountain and island was moved from its place.

15 Then the kings of the earth, the nobles, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 because the great day of their wrath has come! And who is able to stand? ”

# THINGS ARE GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE

The passage reveals the reason why the world is the way it is. It is under judgment.

- **What:** Revelation 6 reveals a series of judgments on earth. God's plans unfold as the Lord Jesus opens each successive seal on the scroll.
- **When:** The judgments occur between the ascension of Jesus and his glorious return, which means that God is judging the unbelieving world **NOW**.
- **Word Pictures:** The imagery used is fascinating—four horsemen, living creatures in heaven, the altar in heaven, and cosmic disruptions. These vivid pictures are not new or unique to John's writings. They are also found in Zechariah, Isaiah, Hosea, and Jesus's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, all in the context of God judging the world.
- **Message:** Revelation 6 is a message to believers. It urges us to stand firm in Christ without compromise, even as things go from bad to worse. It's all in God's plan.

**What does God's judgment look like?**

# WHAT DOES JUDGMENT LOOK LIKE?

What does judgment look like now? God's judgment is often the natural consequence of rejecting or replacing him. Each seal reveals an aspect of it:

- Seal One is about military build-up or **conquest**. Nations gear up for conflict because, in a world captured by sin, there is no peace.
- Seal Two is about armed conflict - nations go to **war**. There are more than 110 armed conflicts ongoing worldwide.<sup>1</sup> 45 in the Middle East and North Africa. 35 in Africa. 21 in Asia. 7 in Europe.
- Seal Three unleashes hunger - **famine** results from war and other factors.
- Seal Four talks of grief - **death** from war, famine, and plague. God limits the scale of destruction to give people an opportunity to repent and turn to Jesus. His mercy and love balance his holiness and justice.
- Seal Five is about hard-heartedness. **Martyrdom** of believers reveals the hard-heartedness of those who hate Christians and our gospel. But when they kill the Christians, they cut themselves off from hearing about salvation in Christ. That's judgment on them.
- Seal Six unlocks terror. **Cosmic disruptions** will accompany the Return of Christ and the Final Judgment. God will reveal his glory as King of the Universe, seated on his heavenly **throne**, and unleash the unrestrained **wrath** of the **Lamb** against sin and unbelief. The rich and powerful who caused so much suffering will quake in fear.

**That's what's going on in the world. It's judgment on sin and unbelief.**

**How should believers respond? What in the world should we do?**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts>

# WHAT IN THE WORLD SHOULD BELIEVERS DO?

**So, that's the situation.** We're living in a world that is under God's judgment and heading towards a terrifying day of reckoning. That's a grim but realistic diagnosis.

What are we supposed to do? As believers, as Christians?

**This isn't a new problem.** In biblical history, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Jeremiah, and the apostles had to answer the question: What in the world should believers do?

The options are:

1. **Separate:** Live in a “church world bubble” and minimize contact with the outside world. Separation *may* make it easier to live for the Lord (though I doubt it), but it also makes evangelism difficult or impossible.
2. **Assimilate:** Embrace the culture entirely. This approach will lead to a loss of Christian distinctives so that we won't be the salty conscience of the community. Assimilation is not an option when we live in a world under judgment; it would compromise our commitment to Christ.
3. **Engage:** Remain distinctly Christian, following Jesus without compromise while also building relationships, advocating for kingdom values in the public square, and sharing Christ and the gospel whenever possible.

Practically speaking, what does it look like for Christians to engage with a world under God's judgment?



# ENGAGING A WORLD UNDER GOD'S JUDGMENT

## The Option for Persecuted Christians

The apostle Peter wrote about engagement in his first letter. Remember, he was writing to a persecuted church in the Roman Empire. It was not a liberal democracy like ours, and there was no freedom of religion or First Amendment rights to free speech, or the like.

Peter advised the Christians to live godly lives, to cooperate with the authorities, to be gentle and respectful, and to share their faith. Those are survival tactics in a violently hostile culture.

## The Option for American Christians

Peter's advice is helpful for American Christians who are not a persecuted minority in a dictatorship. We can engage our world by living godly lives, making friends, gaining trust and respect, cooperating as much as possible, and sharing our faith.

Fair enough, but could our engagement go further than that?

Could we work to redeem and transform our community or nation? Could we help "re-Christianize" America so that God removes his judgment?

I've wrestled with this, and I still don't know the answer. Some of my thoughts are:

- The American church is compromised, and maybe we should work on transforming it before we start critiquing the culture.
- We need another Great Awakening—millions of people turning to Jesus and faithfully following him—before we can make a difference.

- Past initiatives, such as the Moral Majority, failed.
- Political engagement, such as voting and running for office, matters, but not as much as we think. The tide of sin and unbelief feels overwhelming.
- The Book of Revelation indicates that things will not ultimately change—no matter what we do—and that sinful unbelief will continue until the end.

## **What Can We Do?**

The best thing we can do for a world under judgment is to live committed, distinctly Christ-centered lives. In order of importance, that would look like:

1. Stay salty. Don't compromise your faith in Jesus.
2. Raise godly kids who love Jesus, the Bible, and the Church.
3. Commit to your local church—time, talent, treasure.
4. Love your neighbors in sacrificial ways.
5. Work to redeem the culture primarily by sharing your faith. As you have time, skills, or interest, or opportunity, you could also get involved in the community, volunteer for public service, run for office, critique godless ideas, practices, and policies in debates or public settings, and vote for candidates who represent godly values.

# THE ORIGINAL CONCLUSION

## Face Reality.

The world is on a collision course with God. As long as people reject and replace God with their own ideas and behaviors, there is going to be trouble in the world, even for Christians. There is no way to escape the mess. Jesus told his disciples:

*John 16:33 (CSB) You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.*

The safest place in a world under judgment is the church.

## Trust God.

He always does what is right. His plan is sealed with seven, meaning it is perfect and will not change. So, don't panic, pray. Jesus knows what you're going through:

*Revelation 2:9-10 (CSB) I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer.*

## Fear Jesus.

Remember, Revelation 6 was originally written for seven churches in Asia. It's a message to every generation of believers: Stand firm in Christ because the alternative is terrifying. Don't be complacent. Don't compromise because that is a slippery slope to unbelief.

Jesus is the Savior of those who remain faithful, AND he is the Judge of those who turn away in unbelief (Matthew 16:27; John 5:22; Acts 17:31). There will be terrifying punishment for those who reject him.

Stand firm in Christ with uncompromising faith at any cost. Those who lose their lives for Jesus live in heaven with God. The martyrs are pictured under the heavenly altar, dressed in white robes; that is, as God's priests offering their lives as acceptable sacrifices to God. They may kill us, but they cannot separate us from God. Endure temporary hardships because the eternal rewards are greater.

*Revelation 2:10 (CSB) Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

## **Share the Gospel.**

Verse 7 asks a question:

*Revelation 6:17 (CSB)... the great day of their wrath has come! And who is able to stand?*

The answer is, only those who are in Christ by faith. We will stand at the final judgment. He will shelter and protect us on that dreadful day.

All of which is very good news. And good news is for sharing. That's one reason we're alive at such a time as this. We're God's ambassadors bringing his invitation to the world:

*Isaiah 45:21-22 (CSB) There is no other God but me, a righteous God and Savior; there is no one except me. 22 Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other.*

Gossip the gospel any chance you get. Share, discuss, debate, plead, urge, and invite your friends and family to trust in Jesus.

# SMALL GROUP GUIDE

## Review

- Review Peter's November 9<sup>th</sup> teaching and study guide. For more resources, visit [www.famousgod.com/small-groups](http://www.famousgod.com/small-groups).
- What were the main insights of Peter's teaching?
- What questions do you have about the passage or Peter's teaching?
- What were the main applications or takeaways for your life?

## Discuss

- Even in judgment, God's destruction is limited as an opportunity for repentance (Revelation 6:8). How do you reconcile God's love, mercy, and patience with his righteousness, holiness, and justice?
- Peter said believers should "stand firm in Christ with uncompromising faith." What helps you stay faithful when tempted to compromise? What makes it hard to do so? How does knowing the outcome for Christian martyrs (fifth seal), and rewards for faithfulness (eg, Revelation 2:8, 11, 17, 26) encourage you—or challenge you—to stand firm in Jesus?
- Only those who trust in Christ will stand at the final judgment and be sheltered by Him. How does it affect your sense of urgency to share the gospel with others? How can we be more intentional about sharing Christ?

## Prayer Focus

- Pray for grace to follow Christ with uncompromising faith.