

Dr. David Mathewson, Revelation, Session 11, Revelation 6: Scroll Seals Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Revelation, Session 11, Revelation 6: Scroll Seals, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture analyzes Revelation chapter 6, focusing on the **seven seals** and their symbolic meaning. He argues that the **first four seals**, depicted as horses of different colors, represent **God's judgment on the Roman Empire**, specifically its **military conquest, bloodshed, economic injustice, and resulting death and famine**. The **fifth seal** portrays the **souls of martyred Christians** crying out for justice, highlighting the theme of God's vindication of His faithful people. Mathewson connects John's imagery to **Old Testament prophecies** and **Jesus' eschatological teachings**, suggesting a multi-layered interpretation applicable throughout church history, not solely to a future event.

2. 10 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 11 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Revelation).



**Mathewson_Revela
tion_Session11.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture on Revelation 6:

Briefing Document: Revelation 6 - The Scroll Seals

Introduction This document summarizes Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on Revelation 6, focusing on the opening of the seven seals from the scroll described in Revelation 5. The lecture explores the symbolic meaning of these seals, particularly the first four horsemen, and their connection to God's judgment on Rome and other oppressive powers. It also addresses the significance of the fifth seal and its focus on the vindication of persecuted believers.

Key Themes and Ideas

1. Context and Interpretation:

- **Historical Distance:** Mathewson emphasizes the importance of caution when interpreting Revelation due to the 2,000-year gap between its writing and our reading. The original audience likely had a better understanding of the symbols and events.
- **Genre and Symbolism:** Revelation is apocalyptic literature which uses symbolic language. Mathewson argues against overly literal interpretations.
- **Rome as the Primary Focus:** Mathewson proposes that the judgments in Revelation 6 are primarily directed toward the idolatrous, oppressive, and violent Roman Empire and its economic practices. He states that, "God's judgment is being poured out on Rome's idolatrous, godless, oppressive empire and its economy."
- **Broader Application:** He also suggests the judgements apply to any other nation or people that repeat Rome's mistakes. Any nation for whom the "prophetic cap fits must wear it."

1. The Four Horsemen (Seals 1-4):

- **Unified Imagery:** The first four seals are connected by the image of horses riding out upon the earth and are meant to be understood as events that relate to and result from one another.

- **Old Testament Background:** The imagery is likely influenced by Old Testament passages like Zechariah 6, which features chariots and horses. Mathewson states that "John draws his imagery and his description of his vision from text, especially one like Zechariah chapter 6."
- **Eschatological Discourse:** Jesus' teachings in Matthew 24 about wars, famines, and earthquakes before the end are another likely influence on John's vision.
- **Not Literal End Times Signs:** Jesus warns against interpreting those events as the end itself. "These things must happen. Yes, there are signs that the end is coming, but they have to happen, and they are not to be confused with the end itself."
- **First Seal (White Horse):**
 - **Symbol of Military Power:** The white horse rider, with his crown and bow, is not a positive image of Christ but rather a symbol of military conquest and the Roman Empire's expansionist aggression. "This rider... symbolizes, is simply a symbol of conquest and military power." It is a parody of Christ in Revelation 19 who conquers righteously.
 - **Critique of Pax Romana:** The white horse challenges the Roman myth of "Pax Romana," revealing that Rome establishes peace through violence and warfare.
- **Second Seal (Red Horse):**
 - **Symbol of Bloodshed:** The red horse, bearing a rider with a large sword, represents the bloodshed and slaughter resulting from Rome's conquests and internal conflicts. "Rome's promise of peace comes at a price, and that is warfare and bloodshed and violence."
 - **Contrast with Christ's Sword:** The sword is a contrast with the sword from the mouth of Christ, which represents justice and truth, compared to Roman violence.
- **Third Seal (Black Horse):**
 - **Symbol of Economic Injustice:** The black horse rider, carrying scales, symbolizes the economic imbalance and injustice of the Roman system, particularly exploitation of the provinces for the benefit of Rome.

- **Famine and Scarcity:** The high cost of wheat and barley highlights the famine and suffering resulting from this unjust economic system, where necessary staples are scarce, while luxuries like oil and wine are abundant. "So you have this situation where wheat and barley are scarce... you have an economy out of balance...perverted...oppressive."
- **"Do not damage the oil and wine":** This likely highlights how the focus on lucrative exports of oil and wine led to neglect of growing grain, further exacerbating famine.
- **Fourth Seal (Pale Horse):**
 - **Symbol of Death and Hades:** The pale horse and its rider, named Death, along with Hades, represent the culmination of the first three seals, bringing death through warfare, famine, and disease. "Seal number four, then, signifies death and Hades."
 - **Summary of First Three:** This seal serves as a climax and a summary of the preceding judgments and the consequences they carry.

1. Nature of God's Judgement

- **Lamb's Authority:** The seals can only be opened by the Lamb, indicating that these judgments come from God. "I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals."
- **Permitted by God:** The passive voice used (e.g., "was given") shows that these events happen through God's permission and sovereignty.
- **"Handing Them Over":** God's judgment involves "handing them over" to their sins and their consequences, a concept similar to Romans 1, where God "hands them over" to the destructive consequences of their own wickedness and idolatry.
- **Natural Consequences, but Divine Judgment:** While the consequences of Rome's actions might seem like natural outcomes, they are also presented as God's active judgment on a sinful empire.

1. Impact on Christians:

- **Not Protected from Suffering:** Mathewson acknowledges that Christians would have been affected by these events. However, "Christians would not necessarily be physically protected from these things."

- **Refinement, Not Judgment:** For believers, these trials serve as a means of refining their faith and producing endurance and perseverance, as opposed to serving as a direct judgment. For unbelievers it results in judgement.

1. **God's De-Creation**

- **Dismantling the Old:** God is actively deconstructing the present world through judgement in order to bring about the new creation in chapters 21 and 22. "By judging Rome and its empire and its economy, God is, in a sense, judging and dismantling or de-creating this present world in order to bring about the emergence of a new creation."

1. **Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs**

- **Shift in Focus:** The fifth seal is different from the first four, focusing on the souls of those martyred for their faith. The fifth seal is not a plague itself, but a description of the state of faithful followers of Christ.
- **Under the Altar:** These souls are depicted under the heavenly altar, a position of protection and sacrifice, drawing from temple imagery. This demonstrates God's dwelling place in the context of the temple.
- **Cry for Vindication:** The souls cry out for justice and vengeance, not as personal revenge, but as a demand for their blood to be vindicated. "They called out in a loud voice, How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood."
- **Echo of the Old Testament:** Their cry reflects Old Testament themes and language found in places such as Psalms 79, emphasizing God's promise to vindicate His people.
- **Sacrificial Deaths:** The deaths of believers are portrayed in sacrificial terms, likening them to the slain Lamb, Jesus Christ. "Their deaths are presented in sacrificial terms."
- **Anticipation of Wider Persecution:** The fifth seal suggests that the persecution of Christians will intensify, beyond what had already happened.

Conclusion Dr. Mathewson's lecture presents Revelation 6 as a powerful critique of the Roman Empire and its claims to power and peace. The seals reveal the underlying violence, economic injustice, and suffering inherent in its rule, which is seen as a judgement from God. This judgement of Rome is both a literal event, and also a symbolic event that has application for other empires and nations. The fifth seal highlights the vindication of believers and serves as an encouragement during times of persecution. It also sets the stage for understanding future judgement and the final victory of Christ.

4. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 11, Revelation 6: Scroll Seals

Revelation 6: The Scroll Seals - Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the significance of the Lamb opening the seals in Revelation 6?
2. How does the imagery of the four horses relate to the Old Testament, specifically Zechariah 6?
3. What are the key characteristics associated with each of the first four horses?
4. Why does the speaker argue that the rider of the first horse is not Christ?
5. What does the third horse with scales symbolize about the Roman economy?
6. What does the voice in the third seal reveal about the cost of wheat and barley?
7. What is the significance of the phrase, "do not damage the oil and the wine"?
8. How does the fourth seal serve as a culmination of the first three seals?
9. What does the fifth seal reveal about the souls under the altar?
10. What is the main thrust of the cry by the souls of the martyrs under the altar?

Answer Key

1. The Lamb opening the seals signifies that God, through Christ, is initiating judgments upon the world, specifically on the Roman Empire and any other oppressive system. The seals release a series of events that are God's response to the wickedness and injustice of these systems.
2. The imagery of the four horses draws from Zechariah 6, where there are four horses/chariots that go out across the earth. These images provide a prophetic background for understanding the symbolism and message of John's vision.
3. The white horse represents conquest and military power, the red horse signifies bloodshed and violence, the black horse symbolizes famine and economic injustice, and the pale horse embodies death and Hades. Together, they portray the destructive consequences of earthly power and corruption.

4. The speaker argues that the rider of the first horse is not Christ because the context, the other horses, and the parallels with warfare and conquest within the Roman Empire point to a negative image. This imagery is contrasted to Christ's victory in Revelation 19.
5. The black horse carrying scales signifies an imbalance and perversion of justice within the Roman economy, which favored the wealthy while causing suffering and famine for the common people. The Roman Empire's unjust economic system is a key focus of this seal.
6. The voice reveals a severe famine where basic food staples like wheat and barley are exorbitantly priced, making them nearly unattainable for most people. The high cost of daily necessities symbolizes the economic hardship and suffering brought about by the empire.
7. The phrase "do not damage the oil and the wine" highlights an economic imbalance where non-essential items were abundant and protected while staples were scarce, and likely suggests wealthy landowners profited at the expense of the common person who could not afford the basics.
8. The pale horse, with its rider Death and Hades following, represents a culmination of the previous three seals, bringing together warfare, famine, and plague and resulting in death on a massive scale. It serves as the final and most devastating of the seal judgments.
9. The souls under the altar are those who were slain for their faith in Christ and their commitment to the word of God. They are depicted as being in God's protection, with their deaths seen as a sacrifice.
10. The cry by the souls of the martyrs is not a personal plea for revenge but a request for vindication, asking for justice against those who persecuted them and demonstrating that their suffering for their faith was not in vain.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the symbolism of the four horses in Revelation 6, discussing their relationship to Old Testament prophecy, Jesus' eschatological discourse, and the Roman Empire.
2. Explain how the judgments described in the first four seals (the four horses) are connected to the Roman Empire's pursuit of power and its economic practices. Consider the concept of Pax Romana.
3. Discuss the significance of the fifth seal in Revelation 6, particularly its representation of the souls of martyrs under the altar and the implications for the vindication of God's people.
4. In what ways do the events of Revelation 6 challenge the notion that God is only passively observing the actions of humanity? How does this fit with the idea that God hands humans over to their sins?
5. Compare and contrast the way that Christ achieves victory as shown in Revelation with the way the Roman Empire established dominance. How does this relate to the theme of "Pax Romana?"

Glossary

- **Apocalyptic:** A genre of literature that uses symbolic imagery to reveal a divine perspective on historical events and the end times.
- **Denarius:** A Roman silver coin, typically considered to be a day's wage for a common laborer.
- **Eschatological Discourse:** Jesus' teachings regarding the end times, often including signs of the last days (Matthew 24).
- **Hades:** The Greek term for the place of the dead; in Revelation, it is personified as an entity associated with death.
- **Idolatrous:** The practice of worshiping idols, which are images or representations of gods that are not the true God.
- **Lamb:** A symbolic reference to Jesus Christ, as the sacrificial Lamb who is the means of salvation.
- **Pax Romana:** Latin for "Roman Peace." A period of relative peace and prosperity in the Roman Empire that was often achieved through military conquest.
- **Seal:** In Revelation 6, it is one of the seven seals on the scroll in God's right hand, the opening of which unleashes a series of events.
- **Souls under the altar:** Refers to the spirits of martyrs in heaven in the fifth seal, who call out for justice.
- **Vindication:** The act of proving or showing that someone or something is justified, right, or valid.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Revelation, Session 11, Revelation 6: Scroll Seals, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Revelation 6: The Scroll Seals

1. **What is the significance of the four horsemen in Revelation 6?** The four horsemen are symbolic figures representing God's judgment upon earthly powers, particularly focusing on the Roman Empire. The first horse, a white one, symbolizes military conquest and the expansion of power through force, a critique of Rome's *Pax Romana*. The second, a red horse, embodies bloodshed and violence that accompany this conquest. The third, a black horse, signifies famine and economic imbalance, indicating the exploitative nature of Rome's economy. The fourth, a pale horse, is named Death, and represents the culmination of these judgments, resulting in widespread death, plague and chaos. Together, they illustrate the consequences of a godless empire's pursuit of power and dominance.
2. **Are these horses literal entities or symbolic representations?** These horses and their riders are not meant to be taken literally, but as powerful symbols of the consequences of human actions and choices. They represent different aspects of God's judgment on earthly powers, especially those who are violent, oppressive, and disregard justice. The imagery is drawn from the Old Testament, specifically from texts like Zechariah 6, and from Jesus' discourse on the signs of the end times in Matthew 24. They are not necessarily future figures but recurring themes throughout history.
3. **Does the white horse in the first seal represent Jesus Christ or the Gospel?** While some interpretations suggest the white horse as representing Christ or the triumph of the Gospel, the context, especially the clearly negative nature of the subsequent horsemen, suggests otherwise. The white horse is more likely a parody of Christ, symbolizing the false peace and the military conquest of the Roman Empire which contrasts with Christ's message of peace through sacrifice. It represents the way Rome achieved its 'peace' - through war.

4. **How does the third seal, the black horse with scales, depict judgment?** The black horse and its rider with scales symbolize economic injustice and the resulting famine. The scale represents imbalanced commerce and a perversion of justice. The voice among the living creatures indicating the high cost of basic grains (wheat and barley) and preservation of luxuries (oil and wine), exposes the unfair and imbalanced nature of the Roman economy. This highlights a system where necessities are scarce and overpriced, while luxury items are abundant, a result of exploitation and misallocation of resources. This is interpreted as judgment on Rome's exploitative economy.
5. **How do these seals relate to the Roman Empire, and are they only relevant to that period of time?** While the seals are interpreted as a direct critique of the Roman Empire's violence, oppression, and economic injustice, the underlying principles extend to any nation or empire that mirrors such behavior. The judgments depicted in Revelation 6 are not confined to first-century Rome. They reflect a timeless pattern of consequences for any entity that prioritizes power, conquest, and self-interest over justice and God's will. God's judgments in Revelation are not limited by time. They use the Roman empire as the main example but they do not solely apply to Rome.
6. **Are Christians exempt from these judgments, and how do they fit into this narrative?** Christians living during these times would have experienced the hardships depicted by the seals, but these events did not function as judgment *for them*. Instead, for them these hardships would serve as tests and refine them, leading to greater endurance, perseverance and faithfulness. The same events that lead to judgment for unbelievers lead to strengthening of faith for believers. The persecution of Christians is addressed specifically in seal number five.
7. **What is the significance of the fifth seal and the souls under the altar?** The fifth seal shifts from depictions of judgment on the earthly powers to the heavenly perspective of those persecuted for their faith. The souls under the altar represent the martyrs killed for their faithfulness to the word of God and their witness to Jesus. The altar signifies their protection and the sacrificial nature of their deaths. Their cry for vengeance is not a call for personal revenge, but a plea for God to vindicate their suffering and demonstrate that their sacrifice was not in vain. Their cry for justice is to bring justice for all who are victims of such powers.

8. **How do these judgments by God occur, are they "natural consequences" or something more?** God's judgments, while manifested through natural or consequential events, are ultimately God's active hand. These are not simply natural consequences that happen to a system. God "hands them over" to their sins, meaning He allows their destructive tendencies and actions to run their course, leading to their self-destruction. This is not God turning away, but rather an active handing over to the consequences of their godless choices. This handing over of power to evil is itself God's judgment.