

BaptistWay Bible Series for June 26: God ultimately will judge and punish evil_61305

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God ultimately will judge and punish evil

- Revelation 6

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When the Romans exiled the Apostle John to the island of Patmos, they sought to quiet a voice that had been spreading the gospel of Christ 70 years. They did not succeed. God used John in exile to receive the revelation.

An event ordered to shame and mock John was transformed into a message of hope not only for struggling first century Christians but for all mankind to follow. A sovereign God commands all he has created, and he alone ultimately will judge that world and defeat the forces of evil.

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Last week's lesson examined the view of heaven John received. He saw God and Christ enthroned and the entire creation worshipping before the throne. God held a scroll with seven seals containing the completed history of the world. Christ, as the Lamb of God, was deemed worthy of opening the scroll.

This week's study passage examines events portrayed when six of the seven seals were opened.

Revelation 6:1-8

As the Lamb opened the first seal, one of the four creatures called, "Come." The first of four horsemen appeared riding a white horse, symbolizing military conquest. The rider carried a bow, a weapon for military activity, and wore a crown, symbolizing victory. Rome would be defeated. The horseman resembled a Parthian warrior, although it was not the Parthians who defeated the Romans.

A fiery red horse appeared at the opening of the second seal, symbolizing the wrath of war. Its rider carried a sword. Peace is taken away by war. Even the "Peace of Rome" would be lost in the upheaval following war.

As the third seal is opened, upon the command of "come," a black horse appeared with a rider carrying a pair of scales. A voice from among the

four creatures explained crops would be destroyed by the war. Famine would follow, and scarcity of food would make food affordable for only one person in a family. Families would starve, and social upheaval would follow. Wheat and barley, which only could be bought by the poor, would be scarce. Oil and wine still would be enjoyed by the wealthy. Military action would upset society and create strife between the poor and the wealthy.

At the fourth command of “come,” a pale horse appeared, ridden by Death, with Hades following close behind. The first three horsemen symbolized the suffering and death of war and the famine that followed. The fourth horseman compounds those calamities with death by pestilence and wild animals. Many would die from widespread disease following the war. Others would be weakened by disease and killed by scavenging wild animals.

Revelation 6:9-11

The scene changes with the opening of the fifth seal. No living creature orders “come.” Instead, an altar appears with the souls of martyrs killed by Roman persecution placed “under the altar,” signifying they are precious to God. When the martyrs cried out for God to avenge their deaths, they were told to “wait a little longer.” The time of persecution was not over, and they must remain faithful. God would give those who persevered a white robe, symbolizing purity and victory.

Revelation 6:12-17

As the sixth seal is opened, the scene changes to the natural chaos preceding final judgment. Natural disasters as indications of God’s judgment are found in the Old Testament (Amos 8:8; Isaiah 13:3; 34:4;

Jeremiah 4:24; Ezekiel 38:19). The entire world and the universe itself will be affected by these disasters. The predictable order of the universe will be disrupted. The entire population will hide in caves and among rocks and plead for protection from the forces of nature. No one can oppose "... the great day of their wrath" (v. 17). "Their" refers to the wrath of God and the Lamb—"... him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" (v. 16).

Chapter 6 presents a panoramic view of history. All the evil in the world that has created strife and caused suffering will lead to final judgment by God. God ultimately will judge and punish evil, and he will reward those who persevere.

John was given the revelation in order to take a message of hope to the suffering Christian church—God was in total command of his creation. Since God was in command, believers were assured they had nothing to fear. Even in the face of persecution, they would overcome.

Application

We are blessed to live in a nation where we do not suffer outright persecution as Christians. It is difficult for us to relate to the first-century Christians, who feared for their lives. Instead, we live in a society in which our existence as Christians is threatened by our own apathy. Christianity in our country will not be destroyed by outside forces but by the failure of individual Christians to practice the things Christ told us to do.

We should be comforted by the same message the first century Christians received through the revelation—a sovereign God in command of his created universe. At the same time, we should remember to "count our blessings" and continue to seek God's direction for our lives.

Discussion question

- Early Christians were persecuted when they were identified as Christians. Is there evidence in my life that would identify me as a Christian?

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.