**The Book of Revelation: Study Notes 5**

**Revelation 6:1–8:1**

**Revelation 6:1-2: The First Seal and the White Horse**

*And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come."  2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer.*

**Preterist**

The four horsemen of the first four seals represent either Vespasian, Titus, or Christ, having been given divine authority to wage war, famine, death against apostate Jerusalem, which crucified Christ.

The calamities are the sufferings of Israel during her three-year struggle (AD 68–70) against Rome.

**Historicist**

*A white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow;* refers to the period or roman imperialism, from 96-180 (Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius Pius, Antonius Aurelius) ending in AD 180*.*

*He who sat on it had a bow,* possiblyemperorNerva, of Cretan descent known for their skill with bow.

Or it may be Christ on the white horse spreading the gospel with his bow.

Gibbon, “the golden age of the roman empire”; Toynbee, “the Indian Summer of Rome’s greatness,” Rome conquering most territories once ruled by the Greeks, Medo-Persians and Babylonians.

**Futurist**

Some see the rider on the white horse, as Christ, spreading the gospel to the nations.

Most see the white horse rider as the introduction of the anti-Christ at the beginning of the tribulation period. His crown is won through conquest, having received all power from Satan (Luke 4:6)

**Idealist**

*Come,* refers to the yearning for Christ to “come” and deliver believers from suffering (Rom 8:19-22)

This rider represents *conquest, war, famine, death*, often seen in history, as instruments in God’s plan.

**Revelation 6:3-4: The Second Seal and War**

*And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come."  4 And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.*

**Preterist**

*It was granted to take peace from the earth,* refers to loss of peace in Israel, upon Rome’s invasion.

This rider implies civil war within Israel, even as the roman legions press their attack (Zech 11:10-14)

**Historicist**

The period of the red horse runs from emperors Commodus to Diocletian, AD 180-284, a period of civil war and bloodshed within the roman empire.

This period saw 32 emperors, with 27 usurpers come and go through bloody (Red horse) struggle.

**Futurist**

The “red horse” fulfills Matthew 24:6, as nations find themselves in continual conflict with each other.

Hal Lindsay identifies the rider on the red horse as Russia with her Arab allies in the middle east.

*And a great sword was given to him,* suggests fierce warfare, resulting in large numbers of deaths.

**Idealist**

The red horse represents war and civil strife, nations against nations and society breaking down due to rampant crime, fulfilling Matthew 26:52, all who take up the sword will perish by the sword.

*A great sword,* may also refer to the continual persecution and slaughter of believers across time.

**Revelation 6:5-6: The Third Seal and Catastrophic Famine**

*And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.  6 And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."*

**Preterist**

The black horse and scales represent food shortage, famine (Lam 5:10). Josephus records the case of a mother eating her infant during Rome’s siege of Jerusalem (Wars 5:13:6)

*No harm to oil, wine,* suggests the Jews kept temple functioning during the struggle.

**Historicist**

The black horse & scales represent fiscal oppression during 3rd century by Rome.

*A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius,* points to Rome’s policy of collecting exorbitant taxes in the form of food stuffs as well as currency.

Farmers destroyed crops to avoid taxes, thus, edict “*do not harm the oil, wine”.*

**Futurist**

The black horse, scales represent severe famine during the tribulation. International capitalists will manipulate the cost of oil, food, leading to hyperinflation.

*No harm to oil, wine,* representluxury items, for those who can afford conspicuous consumption, exacerbating the disparity between the “have” and “have not's”.

**Idealist**

The black horse represents famine, one of God’s four severe judgments (Ezek 14:21; 15:16), however, it is selective, for the rich always have access to “oil” and “wine”.

The third seal (black horse and scales) refers to economic persecution of Christians.

**Revelation 6:7-8: The Fourth Seal and Death**

*And when He broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come."  8 And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.*

**Preterist**

The pale horse represents death, the final outcome of Roman hostilities against Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 14:21 identifies sword, hunger, pestilence, and beasts as the four severe judgments upon Jerusalem, which Josephus describes in *Wars 5:12:3-4.*

**Historicist**

This was fulfilled between AD 248-268, encompassing the reigns of the roman emperors Decius, Gallus, Amelianus, Valerian and Gallenius.

These rulers brought great shame and misfortune to Rome. Gibbons notes that 5,000 people died daily due to barbarian attacks, pestilence and famine.

**Futurist**

The pale horse symbolizes extensive death (1/4 world population, fulfilling Matthew 24:21.

The pale horse may represent “the Great Tribulation” the 2nd half of the tribulation.

**Idealist**

The pale horse symbolizes death, the combination of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Some don’t see ¼ population wiped as one event, but rather as a cumulative effect.

**Revelation 6:9-11: The Fifth Seal and a Cry for Justice**

*And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"  11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.*

**Preterist**

*I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain,* refers to the righteous who had been martyred at the hands of the Jews. The life is in the blood (Lev 17:11), and it cries out for vengeance.

*On those who dwell on the earth*, reveals Jerusalem had not yet fallen when Revelation was written.

This passage echoes Matthew 23:35 f. (see also Luke 18:1–8)

**Historicist**

*They were told that they should rest for a little while longer,* refers to reign of emperor Diocletian (AD 284-304), when persecution and martyrdom increased, shortly before Constantine’s reign.

**Futurist**

*the souls of those slain,* refers to persons martyred during the tribulation, but not part of the church.

Some believe non-Jews that come to faith in Christ will be martyred. The remnant of Israel, however, are sealed and protected from such fate.

**Idealist**

*The souls of those slain…the word of God,* symbolize the sacrificial nature of a believer’s martyrdom.

Christian martyrs cry out for future vindication, but are robed in white, symbolizing purity, peace.

**Revelation 6:12-17: The Sixth Seal and the Great Day of Wrath**

*And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.  14 And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.  15 And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves 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 presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?"*

**Preterist**

This fulfills Malachi 3:2, the end of the Jewish state for having persecuted the church.

*They hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, p*rophecies the attempt of Jewish leaders to hide in caves, but to no avail (Josephus, Wars 6:7:3).

**Historicist**

This vision symbolizes the fall of Roman paganism to Christianity, upon emperor Constantine’s ascension and conversion in the early fourth century.

The Earthquake is a metaphor for the shaking of political power; sun, moon, stars, represent the downfall of Rome's downfall; the dissolution of “the pagan firmament!”

**Futurist**

These events herald the beginning of the last days. The earthquake, is a metaphor for divine visitation (Exod 19:18; Hag 2:6), symbolizing the political and ecclesiastical world crumbling.

Every class of unrepentant people from Kings to slaves are affected and terrorized.

A literal prophecy, thus earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, sun, moon darkening, turning “red”.

**Idealist**

*the great day of their wrath;* depicts the Second Coming of Christ, the climax of all cycles of judgments.

Seven structures of creation (earth, sun, moon, stars, sky, mountains, islands) and people (kings, great, rich, commanders, mighty, slaves, free) to symbolize universality of disasters at 2nd Coming.

**Revelation 7:1-3: The Sealing of God’s Bondservants**

*After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.  2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."*

**Preterist**

These verses answer the question whether Israel’s judgment is total.  It is not, for God has “sealed” a remnant of Israel to survive the terrible destruction.

Ezekiel 9 prophesied faithful Jews would be marked on their foreheads for preservation, and it would happen again in AD 70, when poor Jewish believers (Ebonites) escaped to Pella.

**Historicist**

*the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth,* refers to the tempest of barbarians (Goths, Vandals, Huns), which would ultimately destroy the Roman Empire.

However, God sealed his faithful (pos. the Albigenses, or the Waldensians).

**Futurist**

A literal reading with angels holding back the forces of nature, but for what purpose?

Chapter 7 is not in chronological sequence, but acknowledges people which may yet be saved during the tribulation period, thus “sealed” from the effects of God’s wrath.

**Idealist**

The four winds are the four horsemen, (see Zech 6:5, horses as “winds of heaven”)

The sealing of God’s faithful happens before the four horsemen are unleashed.

**Revelation 7:4-8: Sealing the 144,000 Sons of Israel**

*And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:  5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,  6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,  7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,  8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.*

**Preterist**

A faithful remnant of Jews who recognized Jesus as Messiah, “the first fruits of God” Rev 14:4.

The number 144,000 is a symbolic, of the Jewish Christians that fled to Pella.

**Historicist**

The 144,000 is symbolic of the whole church, the “Israel of God”, sealed before the trumpet judgments begin (Rev 8) with the invading hordes of the 4th century and forward.

Dan is omitted because of this tribe’s historical penchant for idolatry.

**Futurist**

144,000 represent a literal remnant of Jews sealed during the tribulation period.

Some see the 144,000 as evangelists to the world during the tribulation.

God brings Israel to repentance fulfilling Zechariah 12:10-13; Romans 11:26-32.

Dan left out because antichrist may be danite, or because of their historical idolatry.

**Idealist**

The 144,000 represents the church, the true spiritual Israel.

Irregular listing (Judah first, Dan omitted, Joseph replaces Ephraim), reveals that this should not be taken literally as consisting of ethnic Israelites.

**Revelation 7:9-17: The Worshipping Throng**

*After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."  11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."  13 And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?"  14 And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.  15 "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them.  16 "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;  17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes."*

**Preterist**

*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation,* refers to vast numbers of gentile believers who were incorporated into the kingdom, when gentile evangelism took off after Judaism came to its fateful end, post A.D. 70.

**Historicist**

These are the 144,000 (Christians), but depicted in their blessed eternal state.

The scene is meant to encourage believers of their eventual triumph.

**Futurist**

Refers to gentiles who will come to salvation during the tribulation period.

The church responded to the gospel of grace; this group responds to gospel of the kingdom, thus these will enter the millennium, but not be counted as the bride of Christ, the NT church.

An earthly group for the temple mentioned is the millennial temple (Ezek 60:64).

**Idealist**

This group represents the church as she will stand glorified in heaven.

White robes, palm branches, purity, victory.  Tribulation happens throughout the church age.

**Revelation 8:1: Heavenly Silence**

*And when He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

**Preterist**

*Silence…for half an hour,* calls for divine vengeance to cease, but only for a short while.

**Historicist**

Half hour of silence, a brief interval before the Germanic hordes invade Rome.

One historicist calculates that ½ hour is approximately 70 years of human history.

**Futurist**

The seventh seal envelops all developments leading to Christ’s second coming, including the seven trumpets and seven bowls, which will shortly follow.

The silence is a pause of expectancy, like before the court foremen reads the verdict.

**Idealist**

Resembles Israelites circling Jericho for seven days in silence before utter destruction.

The half hour is the calm before the storm, the blowing of the seven trumpets.