

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 349 – December 15th – Revelation 6:1-17

Works frequently referenced in these notes on the book of Revelation

Morris, Leon	<i>The Revelation of St John</i> (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1969
Mounce, Robert H	<i>The Book of Revelation</i> (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977
Peterson, Eugene H	<i>Reversed Thunder</i> , San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1991
Witherington, Ben	<i>Revelation</i> (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003

The Seven Seals

"The vision of the glorified Son of man in chapter 1 led to the writing of the seven letters to the churches (chaps 2-3). Similarly the throne-room vision of chapters 4 and 5 sets the stage for the opening of the scroll with its sequence of seals, trumpets and bowls (chaps 6-16). The dramatic portrayal of God's righteous judgement is now under way. It should be noted that the scroll is not actually opened until all seven seals are removed. Thus the content of the scroll begins with chapter 8 and the sounding of the seven trumpets. As each seal is removed we are introduced to a series of preliminary judgements representing forces operative throughout history by means of which the redemptive and judicial purposes of God are being carried out prior to the end." Mounce.

The three sets of seven – seals, trumpets and bowls – overlap, "with the second set beginning before the end of the first and then carrying things further, and the third picking up in the midst of the second set and carrying things even further." Witherington. All three sets of seven end with the same final judgment demonstrated by the repeated use of the terms thunder, lightning, earthquake and hail in varying order at 4:5; 8:5; 11:19 and 16:18-21. This phrase echoes Exod 19:16. Witherington comments, "There are a whole series of judgments that happen *prior* to what amounts to final judgment. This suggests that these preliminary temporal judgments should not be seen as purely punitive. Rather they are calls to repentance and opportunities for amendment of life." John believed that these judgments were already in train, the seals were already being broken. The timing of the final day of judgment is unknown but the world is living on borrowed time.

Verse 1

Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὸ ἀρνίον μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ σφραγίδων, καὶ ἤκουσα ἑνὸς ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγοντος ὡς φωνῆ βροντῆς: Ἔρχου.

ὅτε conj when, at which time

ἀνοιγῶ see 5:2

εἷς, μία, ἓν gen ἑνος, μίας, ἑνος one

σφραγίς, ἰδος f see 5:1

The judgments that follow "happen because of Christ's action of taking the scroll and unsealing the seals. He is then in some sense sovereign over them and responsible for them."

ζῶον, οὐ n see 4:6

βροντή, ἡς f thunder

ἔρχου Verb, pres midd/pass dep imperat, 2 s

ἔρχομαι

The call 'come' is a call for the first of the apocalyptic horsemen to ride forth. The reading 'come and see' is the result of copyists who thought the command an invitation to the Seer.

Verse 2

καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδὸν ἵππος λευκός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἔχων τόξον, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στέφανος, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ.

ἵππος, οὐ f horse

λευκός, ἡ, ον white, shining

The imagery of various coloured horses is from Zech 1:8-17; 6:1-8.

τόξον, οὐ n bow (of an archer)

ἐδόθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s διδομι

στέφανος, οὐ m wreath, crown

νικᾶω conquer, overcome, win the verdict

There are various suggestions concerning the identity of the rider on the white horse. Many think the rider is Christ himself as in 19:11-16. The picture is then one of the activity of Christ in establishing his kingdom alongside the acts of judgement – wars, earthquakes, famine etc. – which also mark the period between the advents (cf. Lk 21:9ff; Mk 13:7ff; Mt 24:6ff). Others argue that this cannot be so, pointing out the differences between the picture here and that of chap 19 and also the phrase 'it was given' which they argue to be inappropriate of Christ. Mounce follows many others in seeing the first horse as a symbol of the spirit of conquest and of militarism. The crown is a symbol of victory and white symbolises the conqueror. DT Niles writes, "When men wage war they always pretend to be fighting for righteousness."

Witherington suggests that the picture may owe something to "the Parthian archers, who in AD 62 (as well as in 53 and 35 BC) came riding from the east and won against the Romans." They were famed and dreaded cavalymen and skilled mounted archers whose armies included sacred white horses. Witherington concludes, "While to some degree we have here a general symbol of military conquest, John has chosen his general image so it would be familiar and thus on target with his audience."

Verse 3

Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν δευτέραν, ἤκουσα τοῦ δευτέρου ζώου λέγοντος· Ἔρχου. δευτερος, α, ον second

Verse 4

καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἄλλος ἵππος πυρρός, καὶ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἐδόθη αὐτῷ λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἵνα ἀλλήλους σφάζουσιν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ μάχαιρα μεγάλη.

ἄλλος, η, ο another, other
πυρρός, α, ον red, fiery red

The colour is symbolic of war, slaughter and bloodshed.

λαβεῖν Verb, aor act infin λαμβανῶ
εἰρήνη, ης f peace

Perhaps to destroy the Pax Romana? The figure may represent "civil or internal strife, which was tearing the world apart during this and earlier periods." Witherington.

ἀλλήλων, οἰς, οὐς reciprocal pronoun one another

σφάζουσιν Verb, aor act subj, 3 pl σφαζῶ
slaughter, put to death

Cf. Zech 14:13.

μάχαιρα, ης f sword, war, violent death

μεγας, μεγαλη, μεγα large, great

Verse 5

Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξε τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τρίτην, ἤκουσα τοῦ τρίτου ζώου λέγοντος· Ἔρχου. καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος μέλας, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἔχων ζυγὸν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ.

τρίτος, η, ον third

μελας, αινα, αν gen ανος, αινης, ανος black

Symbol of scarcity.

ζυγος, ου m yoke, balance scale

χειρ, χειρος f hand, power

"The balance indicates a time of scarcity when the basic commodities of life are measured out at greatly inflated prices. In portraying the siege of Jerusalem, God told Ezekiel that its inhabitants would 'eat bread by weight [and] drink water by measure' (Ezek 4:16; cf. Lev 26:26)." Mounce.

Verse 6

καὶ ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγουσαν· Χοινίξ σίτου δηναρίου, καὶ τρεῖς χοίνικες κριθῶν δηναρίου· καὶ τὸ ἔλαιον καὶ τὸν οἶνον μὴ ἀδικήσης.

χοινίξ, ικος f quart (a dry measure)

σιτος, ου m grain, wheat

δηναριον, ου n denarius

A day's wage.

τρεις, τρια gen τριων dat τρισιν three

κριθη, ης f barley

ἔλαιον, ου n olive oil, oil

οἶνος, ου m wine

ἀδικήσης Verb, aor act subj, 2 s ἀδικεῶ
harm

There are limits to the famine. The succeeding seals mark increasingly severe judgments. Witherinton draws attention to the act of Domitian in 92 AD whereby he destroyed half the vineyards throughout the provinces. He comments, "We may take the exempting of the vineyards and the olive trees as a sign of how God was merciful in comparison to Domitian. The loss of a grain crop could be endured, for another one would come along the following year, but the destruction of vines and olive trees would cripple the region's economy for years, and there were indeed areas in Asia Minor where this judgment would be particularly devastating (e.g. Philadelphia with its vineyard culture)."

Verse 7

Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην, ἤκουσα φωνὴν τοῦ τετάρτου ζώου λέγοντος· Ἔρχου.

τεταρτος, η, ον fourth; το τ. a fourth part, a quarter (of the earth)

Verse 8

καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος χλωρός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ Θάνατος, καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἠκολούθει μετ' αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς, ἀποκτεῖναι ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ ἐν λιμῶ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων τῆς γῆς.

χλωρος, α, ον green (pale)

"χλωρος is used elsewhere in Rev to describe the yellow green of vegetation (8:7; 9:4; cf. Mk 6:39 and Gen 1:30, χοτον χλωρον), but here describes the pallor of death or the blanched appearance of a person struck with terror." Mounce. Witherington suggests, "the colour of a putrefying corpse."

ἐπάνω prep with gen. on, upon
ὄνομα, τος n name

θάνατος, ου m death

ἄδης, ου m Hades, the world of the dead

ἀκολουθεω follow, accompany

ἐδόθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s διδωμι

ἐξουσία, ας f authority, power

Not a geographic area but a proportion. Again, expressing a limit to the judgement.

ἀποκτεῖναι Verb, aor act infin ἀποκτενω
kill, put to death

ῥομφαία, ας f sword, pain, sorrow

λιμος, ου m & f famine, hunger

θηριον, ου n animal, beast, wild animal

Cf. Ezek 14:21. "Death by wild beasts ... would be expected in a land decimated by war and famine." Mounce.

Verse 9

Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν πέμπτην σφραγίδα, εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον.

πέμπτος, η, ον fifth

ὑποκάτω prep with gen under, beneath
θυσιαστηριον, ου n altar

"It is probably unimportant to conjecture whether the altar is the altar of burnt offering or the altar of incense. The theme of sacrifice would suggest the former, and the prayers which rise (vs. 10) seem to indicate the latter. There is no reason why in John's vision the two should not blend together as one." Mounce.

ψυχη, ης f life, 'soul', living being

"In OT ritual sacrifice the blood of the bullock was poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering (Lev 4:7; Ex 29:12). This blood contained the life, or soul, of the flesh (Lev 17:11). That the souls of the martyrs were underneath the altar is a way of saying that their untimely deaths on earth are from God's perspective a sacrifice on the altar of heaven." Mounce. Cf. 2 Tim 4:6; Phil 2:17. E Boring comments, "The chopping block of the Roman executioner has become a cosmic altar. Christians who refuse to sacrifice to the image of the Emperor are nonetheless Christian priests who sacrifice themselves on the altar of God."

ἐσφαγμένων Verb, perf pass ptc, gen pl
σφαζω see v.4

μαρτυρία, ας f testimony, witness

"The martyrs' testimony was not primarily their witness about Jesus but the witness that they had received from him (cf. 12:17; 20:4)." Mounce.

Verse 10

καὶ ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· Ἔως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς;

κραζω cry out, call out

ἕως conj/prep with gen. until, while

πότε interrog adv. when? (ἕως ποτε how long?)

δεσποτης, ου m Lord, Master

Emphasises absolute power.

ἅγιος, α, ον holy

ἀληθινος, η, ον real, genuine, true

κρινω judge, pass judgement on

ἐκδικεω help (someone) get justice,
avenge, punish

αἷμα, ατος f blood

κατοικεω live

"This request does not rise from a personal desire for revenge, but out of concern for the reputation of God." Mounce. And, we might add, for those who continue to suffer injustice and persecution. Cf. Ps 79:10; 94:3; Hab 1:2.

Verse 11

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐκάστῳ στολὴ λευκή, καὶ ἐρρέθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν, ἕως πληρωθῶσιν καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτενεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί.

ἐδόθη see v.2

ἐκαστος, η, ον each, every

στολη, ης f robe, long robe

λευκος, η, ον white, shining

Symbol of blessedness and purity, cf. 3:5; 7:9-14; 19:8 also 3:18.

ἔρρέθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s λεγω
 αναπαύσονται Verb, aor midd subj, 3 pl
 αναπαυω refresh; midd relax, rest
 ἐτι still, yet
 χρονος, ου m time, period of time
 πληρωθῶσιν Verb, aor pass subj, 3 pl
 πληρωω fill, fulfill, accomplish
 συνδουλος, ου m fellow-servant
 μελλω (before an infin) be going, be about
 ἀποκτένεσθαι Verb, pres pass infin
 ἀποκτεινω see v.8

"The charge is not to control their impatience but to rest in the enjoyment of their blessedness. There are others who are yet to join their number." Mounce.

Verse 12

Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἕκτην, καὶ σεισμός μέγας ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ἐγένετο μέλας ὡς σάκκος τρίχινος, καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὅλη ἐγένετο ὡς αἷμα,

ἕκτος, η, ον sixth
 σεισμος, ου m earthquake

Cosmic disturbances which precede the end. Earthquake signals divine visitation, cf. Ex 19:18; Is 2:19; Hag 2:6; Matt 27:45,51 (Heb 12:26).

ἥλιος, ου m the sun
 μελας, ανα, αν gen ανος, αινης, ανος black
 σακκος, ου m sackcloth, mourning dress
 τριχινος, η, ον of hair (σακκος τ. sackcloth)

The reference is to rough cloth made of black goats' hair, worn in time of mourning.

σεληνη, ης f moon
 ὅλος, η, ον whole, all, complete
 αἷμα, ατος f blood

"The deep blood-red colour of the moon would result from whatever in the atmosphere caused the sun to be darkened." Mounce. Cf. Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:20; Is 13:10; Ezek 32:7; Amos 8:8; Mk 13:24.

Verse 13

καὶ οἱ ἀστῆρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔπεσαν εἰς τὴν γῆν, ὡς συκὴ βάλλει τοὺς ὀλύνθους αὐτῆς ὑπὸ ἀνέμου μεγάλου σειομένη,

ἀστηρ, ερος m star
 ἔπεσαν Verb, aor act indic, 3 pl πιπτω fall,
 fall down

συκη, ης f fig tree
 βαλλω throw, throw down
 ὀλυνθος, ου m late fig, unripe fig
 ἀνεμος, ου m wind
 σειω shake

Cf. Is 34:4; Mk 13:25-26.

Witherington comments, "The opening of the sixth seal brings us to the end of the cosmos as we know it (cf. Isa 13:9-11; 24:21-23; 1 En 102:2-3)."

Verse 14

καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπεχωρίσθη ὡς βιβλίον ἐλισσόμενον, καὶ πᾶν ὄρος καὶ νῆσος ἐκ τῶν τόπων αὐτῶν ἐκινήθησαν.

ἀπεχωρίσθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s
 ἀποχωρίζομαι separate; perhaps vanish
 or split open

βιβλιον, ου n book, scroll
 ἐλισσω roll up

"The heavens are removed like an unrolled papyrus scroll which, should it break in the middle, would roll quickly back on either side." Mounce.

ὄρος, ους n mountain, hill
 νησος, ου f island
 τοπος, ου m place
 ἐκινήθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl κινεω
 move, shake, remove

Verse 15

καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ μεγιστάνες καὶ οἱ χιλιάρχοι καὶ οἱ πλούσιοι καὶ οἱ ἰσχυροὶ καὶ πᾶς δοῦλος καὶ ἐλεύθερος ἔκρυσαν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς τὰ σπήλαια καὶ εἰς τὰς πέτρας τῶν ὀρέων·

βασιλευς, εως m king
 μεγισταν, ανος m person of high status
 χιλιάρχος, ου m commander (a high ranking military officer generally in charge of 600-1000 men), high ranking officer
 πλουσιος, α, ον rich, well-to-do
 ἰσχυρος, α, ον strong, mighty, powerful
 δουλος, ου m slave, servant
 ἐλευθερος, α, ον free, free person

The stress is particularly upon those who presently feel secure – though the last two categories make it clear that terror will be universal. Witherington points out that this "sevenfold categorisation of humanity ... [is] a symbol of completeness or totality" – though again he recognises that the stress is upon the wealthy and powerful.

κρυπτω hide, conceal, cover
 ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον him/herself, itself
 σπηλαιον, ου n cave, hideout (for robbers)
 πετρα, ας f rock, solid rock
 ὄρος, ους n see v.14

Cf. Is 2:10,19,21. "From the day when Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of God (Gen 3:8), the guilty conscience has made man a fugitive from God. But now there is no longer a place to hide." Mounce.

Verse 16

καὶ λέγουσιν τοῖς ὄρεσιν καὶ ταῖς πέτραις·
Πέσετε ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ κρύψατε ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ
προσώπου τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ
ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου,

πέσετε Verb, aor act imperat, 2 pl πιπτω see
v.13

Cf. Hos 10:8

προσωπον, ου n face, appearance,
presence

ὀργη, ης f wrath, anger

ἀρνιον, ου n lamb

"The wrath of God is a fundamental theme of NT teaching. It is both a present reality (Rom 1:18) and an eschatological event (Rev 19:15). It is neither personal vindictiveness nor an impersonal process of retribution which works itself out in the course of history. It is rather the 'response of [God's] holiness to persistent and impenitent wickedness' (Bruce). The wrath of the *Lamb*, however, is an unusual and dramatic expression." Mounce.

Verse 17

ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτῶν,
καὶ τίς δύναται σταθῆναι;

Cf. Joel 2:11; Zeph 1:14-18.

δυναμαι can, be able to

σταθῆναι Verb, aor pass infin ἵστημι stand

Cf. Nahum 1:6; Mal 3:2. "The beginning of the end has arrived, and the plagues of 8:7-9:21 and 16:2-21 follow upon the actual opening of the seven-sealed scroll." Mounce.