

• *John sees in visionary form that Jesus has become the King of the universe*

We must try to keep in mind everything that is happening in Revelation 4:1–8:1. John has been transported ‘in spirit’ to heaven. He has seen the residents of heaven worshipping the Creator[♠]¹. He has seen (in visionary form) that Jesus by his death and resurrection has become the King of the universe. It is the ascension that makes Jesus to be the King. Jesus’ kingdom does not start at his second coming; it starts from the time of the ministry of Jesus. ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’, Jesus would often say at the beginning of his ministry here on earth. Jesus ‘bound’ Satan in some manner during his ministry (as Matthew 28:18–20; Luke 11:20–22; John 12:31; Colossians 2:15 show us; how this relates to Revelation chapter 20 is something we shall leave aside for the moment).

♠¹ 4:1-11

Four ways of interpreting Revelation

1. *Mainly about the past*

2. *A continuous chronological history*

3. *Mainly about the future*

4. *Lessons about the way the Lord Jesus Christ rules now – round and round this theme*

Perhaps this is the right point to say something about the different ways in which people have interpreted this book. (1) Some people tend to think the book of Revelation is **mainly about past history**. (2) Some think it is a **continuous story of history in chronological order**. (3) Some think it is mainly about **the future**. Among these are interpreters who think that Revelation 4:1 refers to ‘the rapture’ and that chapters 4–19 are all about a time after the rapture. Actually the rapture is not mentioned in Revelation 4:1 at all. It is John who is caught up in spirit. There is no mention of the church. (4) A fourth group (and I include myself at this point) think the book of Revelation mainly revolves around the lessons that can be learnt from the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the way in which he rules the world until his second coming and the end of the world. The book goes round and round this theme, showing how the King of the universe rules over his world **now**. The thought is not in chronological sequence but it goes round-and-round this point, showing how the King – the Lord Jesus Christ – will triumph in this world and bring in his final kingdom. But he does not start reigning when the final stage of his kingdom comes; he is reigning **now**.

Jesus opens the seals

In Revelation 5:1–14, John has seen how the Lord Jesus Christ ‘takes the book’ into his hands, that is, how in his death and resurrection he becomes the King of the universe. From this point onwards, in his vision, John sees how Jesus ‘opens the seals’. Opening the seals is a way of saying ‘carry forwards God’s purposes in history’.

• *God’s purposes carried forward*

We come then to Revelation 6:1 which says: *Then I was looking when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living beings saying, ‘Come!’*, speaking as if he had a voice of thunder. The translations that have ‘Come and see’ are mistaken. The words ‘and see’ are not found in the best Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The living beings, the representatives of God’s purposes over creation, are calling for something to happen in the history of the world. The living being speaks as if with a voice of thunder. This speaks of the greatness and the vast power that is involved when God rules his world.

The rider on a white horse

• A vision of the Lord Jesus Christ

• Conquering and to conquer

• Horses – represent God's power and also evil powers

• The Saviour rides out with His gospel to conquer the world

• Although the victory does not come rapidly

Then John sees something happen in his vision. Revelation 6:2 says: *Then I was watching and there before me was a white horse. The rider on the horse was given a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.* The first horse with its rider seems to be a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some expositors think it refers to pagan conquests; this would mean it is hardly any different from the content of the second seal in 6:3–4. At this point of the book of Revelation the only people yet mentioned who do any conquering are the people of God and their Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. The word 'conquer' has been used frequently by John. Constantly he says the believer may conquer^{□1} and he explicitly says that the believer conquers as Jesus has conquered^{□2}. Revelation 5:5 has told us how he conquers – by his death and resurrection. So at this point of the book there is only one person we would think of who is going out 'conquering and to conquer' – the Lord Jesus Christ. No other conquering figure has been mentioned as yet (I know about 11:7; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7). 'Conquer' is actually a favourite word of the apostle John (see also John 16:33; 1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4 (twice), 5). One cannot complain that Jesus is the opener of the seal and so cannot be the content of the seal. Almost anything can happen in visions like these.

Horses play a special part in visions. They may represent God's power^{□1} and they may represent evil powers^{□2}. The horses of Revelation 6:3–8 represent persecution, economic hardship, widespread death and bloodshed. But the first horse represents the Messiah. We are being shown a vision of the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ as he 'opens the seals'. He rides out with his gospel. His gospel conquers the world but it does not do so speedily. The Messiah has the white horse of victory^{□3}. He gets victory with the sword of his mouth^{□4}. The Saviour conquers by the preaching of his gospel. That victory does not come rapidly. The preaching of the gospel does not abolish the various tragedies and persecutions that are typical of the world. But the story is not ended yet. Jesus rides forward conquering (for he has already conquered^{□5}). And he has plans to do still more conquering. He will continue to ride forth despite persecutions against his people, despite their hardships and their experience of martyrdom. The story continues. He must reign until he has put all enemies beneath his feet.

□1
2:7,11,17,26;3:5,12,21
□2 3:21

□1 as in 2 Kings 2:11
□2 as in Joel 2:4-5 and Zechariah 1:8-19

□3 as in 19:11-16
□4 19:15

□5 5:5



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