

REVELATION

The 4 Horsemen

Revelation 6:1

March 16, 2024

After having the privilege of watching the coronation of Christ in heaven, John was now prepared to witness the great spiritual conflict on earth between those who love God and those who do not. That brings us to Revelation chapter 6.

After Christ assumed his place on the throne, He began to, one by one, break the seals of the scroll. As each seal was broken, something occurred on earth.

Reminder: the scenes you are about to witness are symbolic in nature.....

At the breaking of each of the 1st Four Seals, a horse and rider appeared. Each horse is a different color and each rider is holding something different in his hand. Zechariah's vision helps unlock the symbolism of Revelation 6:

Zechariah 1:7-11 (LEB) - On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah the prophet, son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, I had a vision in the night, and look, a man riding on a red horse. And he was standing between the myrtle shrubs that were in the ravine, and behind him were red, reddish-tan, and white horses. And I asked, "What are these, my lord?" And the angel who was talking with me said, "I will show you what these are." And the man standing between the myrtle shrubs answered and said, "These are those whom Yahweh has sent to patrol the earth." And they answered the angel of Yahweh who was standing between the myrtle shrubs, and they said, "We have patrolled the earth, and look, all the earth is dwelling in peace."

So, in essence, heavenly horsemen are responsible for monitoring events on earth and reporting back.

- **1st Seal – White Horse (6:1-2)**

As Jesus breaks the 1st seal a Rider on a White Horse appears. The Rider is holding a bow and wearing the *stephanos* crown.

In John's day, Roman generals would go on parade riding a white horse in celebration of a great victory.

In the Old Testament, God is sometimes pictured as mighty general, riding a horse and carrying a bow, conquering the enemies of His people.

- Habakkuk 3:8-13
- Psalm 45:4-5

In the New Testament, Christ is portrayed as riding a white horse, leading the heavenly armies in the final battle of earth's history.

- Revelation 19:11-16

White is a symbol of purity (Revelation 3:4-5, 18; 4:4; 7:13-14) and the *Stephanos* Crown is regularly associated with the victorious saved (1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

This rider is a conqueror and his mission is to engage in spiritual warfare against the forces of evil and win people for God.

Through the powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit, that began at Pentecost, 31 AD, the gospel spread rapidly and thousands were converted in a short period of time. Heaven had begun to shake the foundations of evil!

- **Acts 1:8** - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

- **Acts 2:41** - Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.
- **Acts 2:47** - ... praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved

- **2nd Seal – Fiery Red Horse (6:3-4)**

As Jesus breaks the 2nd seal a Rider on a Red Horse appears. The Rider is carrying a sword and has been given authority to take away peace from the earth.

How is peace taken away?

Even though Christ is now the legitimate ruler of earth, his rule is not unchallenged. There are still rebellious people who do not accept His authority.

The Gospel always divides people because some accept it (peace), while others reject it (loss of peace) and with this comes conflict.

- **Matthew 10:34-36** - Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law -- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

Satan and his minions fight back against the spreading of the Gospel and they rally those who have rejected the Gospel against those who have accepted it.

- **Matthew 7:15-16a** - "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them."
- **Matthew 24:10-11** - At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.
- **2 Peter 2:1-2** - But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them -- bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.
- **1 John 4:1-3** - Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Persecution inevitably follows (see Paul's experiences in Acts).

- **3rd Seal – Black Horse (6:5-6)**

As Jesus breaks the 3rd seal a Rider on a Black Horse appears. The Rider is carrying a pair of scales.

One of the 4 Living Creatures makes an announcement:

- **Revelation 6:6** - A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!

In Palestine, grain, oil and wine were the 3 main crops. To carefully weigh grain revealed scarcity of food or famine.

In John's day, a denarius was the daily wage. Normally, this was enough to buy all family necessities. However, in times of food shortages or famine a day's wage did not provide for a family's needs.

In the imagery of the 3rd seal, a day's wage is only enough to pay for one person per day. Barley was less expensive, but even then, it would only feed a small family. Clearly there is a shortage of food, but what kind of food?

- **Amos 8:11-14** - "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land -- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. In that day the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst. They who swear by the shame (or by the idol) of Samaria, or say, 'As surely as your god lives, O Dan,' or, 'As surely as the god of Beersheba lives' -- they will fall, never to rise again."

The 3rd seal represents what will happen to those who reject the gospel:

- Grain/Bread in the Bible symbolize the Word of God and Jesus, Himself

Matthew 4:4 - Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

John 6:35 - Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

The good news is that this famine of spiritual food is not yet fatal. The same voice that sent the horseman, declares that the oil and the wine will not be affected by the famine and will continue to be available.

- Oil in the Bible symbolizes the Holy Spirit

Matthew 25:6-9 - At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

- Wine in the Bible symbolizes salvation in Jesus

Matthew 26:27-28 - Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Why is this good news? Because, even though knowledge of the Word of God is scarce, the Holy Spirit is still working and Salvation is still available.

- **4th Seal – Ashen Horse (6:7-8)**

As Jesus breaks the 4th seal a Rider on an Ashen Horse appears. The Rider's name is Death and he brings Hades with him.

The Greek word for the color of this horse is "*chloros*," which indicates the ashen-gray color of a decomposing corpse.

Death and Hades were given power over a ¼ of the earth to kill by sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts.

This graphic description helps us understand what the ultimate consequences are of rejecting the Gospel = Spiritual famine typically results in spiritual death.

However, even here there is good news. The power of Death and Hades is limited because Jesus has won the victory over them:

- **Revelation 1:18** - I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Therefore, Death and Hades have no power or authority over those who have accepted the Gospel and have received the gift of eternal life.

The key to unlocking the meaning of the 4 horsemen, is found in the Old Testament covenant relationship between God and Israel.

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He initiated a covenant with them – which they readily accepted.

Exodus 19:5-6, 8 – 'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites..... The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said."

As long as the people obeyed and stayed within the covenant relationship, God blessed them.

Leviticus and Deuteronomy (ch. 26 and 28) contain lists of the blessings Israel could expect if they lived according to God's instructions and curses (ch. 26 and 32), if they chose, instead, to break the covenant and turn to other gods (which they did).

These warnings included 4 plagues – wild beasts, sword, pestilence and famine:

Deuteronomy 32:23-25 – I will heap calamities upon them and spend my arrows against them. I will send wasting famine against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague; I will send against them the fangs of wild beasts, the venom of vipers that glide in the dust. In the street the sword will make them childless; in their homes terror will reign. Young men and young women will perish, infants and gray-haired men (see the entire chapter and Leviticus 26:13-26).

The covenant curses were disciplinary in nature. They were used as instruments of divine judgment against unfaithful Israel – against those who had rejected and abandoned their covenant relationship with God. Yet even these curses were mixed with mercy. They were used as a means to bring the people to repentance and back into their covenant relationship with God. Sadly, Israel was unfaithful and consistently broke the covenant (see Old Testament).

Ezekiel 14:21 – For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments -- sword and famine and wild beasts and plague -- to kill its men and their animals! (see the entire chapter and Ezekiel 5:5-17)

In the end, Israel was dismantled by Assyria and Judah went into captivity in Babylon because they would not repent.

God used this Old Testament covenant curse imagery to describe the experience of “His people” – and their response to the Gospel – from Pentecost to the 2nd Coming.

Matthew 7:21-27 – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Matthew 13:18-23 – “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

White Horse = the victorious spreading of the Gospel

Red Horse = resistance to the Gospel leads to division and conflict and persecution

Black horse = absence of the Gospel - spiritual famine

Ashen Horse = spiritual plague and death

The 4 Horsemen are given as a warning to Christians not to take the Gospel of Jesus lightly.