

5. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Revelation 6:1-8

The Book of Revelation

YouTube video link: <https://youtu.be/BqZSp4NJbxc>

The Opening of the Seals and the Four Horsemen

When we consider the future events described in this book, we must not forget that God is sovereign over the affairs of men, which means that He knows everything and that nothing happens to believers in Christ outside of the Lord's permissive will and control. We don't have to look far in our world to see that evil sometimes reigns, seemingly unchecked by God. The Lord permits some things, but only for a time. He intervenes in answer to prayer. We can think of the story of Exodus when God's people were in slavery in Egypt until they began to cry out to the Lord (Exodus 2:23-25).

Although the things we read about in the Book of Revelation can sometimes seem frightening, we must remember that we are eternal creatures and that this life is not the end. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are not the only things to pursue. Earthly things alone will never fulfill those who desire to walk with Christ. We are strangers and pilgrims in this world (Hebrews 11:13) and are being trained and prepared for the next.

In chapter six of the Book of Revelation, the scene carries on from the last chapter, where John the Apostle saw the Lord Jesus take the seven-sealed scroll from the hand of the Father. In chapters six through eleven, we read through chronological events, followed by chapters twelve through twenty-two, going over specific incidents that take place during the end times. This chronological outline of the main events is also reflected in Jesus' talk about the end times in Matthew 24:3-31.

Let's now explore what effects take place at the opening of each seal:

The First Seal

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest (Revelation 6:1-2).

As we work through the seals, you will notice that the effects of the breaking of the seven seals are almost precisely the same as what Jesus said would happen in his conversation with the twelve disciples on the Mount of Olives, known as the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24). Christ's talk with the disciples was an outline of the main events, whereas the Book of Revelation fills in more of the details. It might be helpful for you to have the ribbon of your Bible or one finger in Matthew 24 and another in Revelation chapter 6.

When the first seal is broken, a rider goes forth on a white horse, and he carries a bow. The Old Testament pictures the bow as a symbol of military power: *"In that day I will break **Israel's bow** in the Valley of Jezreel"* (Hosea 1:5; Jeremiah 51:56). The rider on the white horse has great

military power, “Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?” (Revelation 13:4), a statement that will be believed by many to make Earth’s inhabitants think that resistance is futile, but God’s people will resist: “With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him” (Daniel 11:32). Many writers and commentators believe this man that will come forth is the Antichrist, in other passages of Scripture he is called the Beast (Revelation 13:5, Revelation 17:8-16), and will deceive the world into believing him to be a savior. He will mimic Christ, who will also be riding a white horse at His coming (Revelation 19:12). He is given a crown, and he rides out as a conqueror bent on conquest. The crown he wears is a *Stephanos*, the victor's crown, whereas the crown upon the head of Christ in Revelation 19:12 is *Diadema*, i.e., the royal crown and the crown of authority.

The Antichrist will conquer through his big talk (Daniel 7:8; Revelation 13:5), making himself out to be a Savior, Messiah, and a god, conquering through deception by claiming to solve the problems of the world. His mask will come off later as he brings about war, the second horseman of the apocalypse. In a passage in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 8:25), the prophet warns about a man who would come onto the world scene that could be a reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Epiphanes means God manifest). Many Bible historians believe he was a type or a foreshadowing of the Antichrist because he desecrated the Temple of God in 167 B.C., something that the Antichrist will also do by setting himself in the Temple of God proclaiming himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). You can research what this man (Antiochus IV Epiphanes) did, but right now, I want to focus on the actions of the Antichrist as he appears on the scene:

He will cause **deceit** to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. **When they feel secure, he will destroy many** and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power (Daniel 8:25).

The Prince of princes can only be the Messiah, and that is not something the historical Antiochus IV did in 167 B.C. The Antichrist will “confirm a covenant” (Daniel 9:27) or make a peace treaty over the issue of who owns Jerusalem, which the prophet Daniel says will start a seven-year period, the 70th week of Daniel (Daniel 9:27). The Jewish people say that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish nation. In contrast, the Palestinians want the eastern half of it (The pre-1967 border). The Temple Mount, where the Jewish Temple once stood, has been managed by a Muslim trust since 1187 when the Muslims regained the Temple Mount from the Crusaders. There has been a spiritual struggle for many years as to the ownership of the city of Jerusalem. In fact, a prophecy in the Book of Zechariah says that Jerusalem will be a heavy burden for politicians and world leaders to solve right up to the very end when the Lord comes:

On that day, when all the nations of the Earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves (Zechariah 12:3).

Let’s now look at what Jesus said. In Matthew 24, the disciples asked Jesus, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” As we said at the beginning of this study, Matthew 24:3-31 is chronological, with verses 32 through to the end of chapter 25 having specific teaching about how to live up to and during the end-time. When the disciples asked Jesus what sign there would be of His coming and the end of the age, He replied:

⁴Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many (Matthew 24:4-5).

How has the world seen this phenomenon already? Can you recall names of deceptive leaders claiming to be a "messiah" or "anointed one"? Are there recent instances of this in your lifetime, large or small?

The first thing Jesus talked about concerning the signs of the times is that a high level of deception would be at work in the world. How true is that of the days that we are living in? Both sides of the divide in America are saying the other is engaging in "Fake News." There are so many voices, and people do not know what or who to believe. Can you see the stage being set for someone to come and provide answers and leadership in a crisis? People in every nation are longing for the truth and seeking answers. The Antichrist will provide what the people are clamoring for. Leading up to and into the seventieth week of Daniel, the seven-year period, the world will see some people claiming that they are the Christ, the anointed one. The final manifestation of this will be that the Antichrist himself will come using lies and deceit and claiming that he is the Christ, the one for whom the world has been waiting to bring peace and salvation! He will overcome nations and come to rule over a confederacy of ten regions of the Earth (Daniel 7:23-24). Jesus said to the Jewish people,

"I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him" (John 5:43).

Suppose the passage above refers to the Antichrist. In that case, it is entirely possible that the nation of Israel will buy into the Antichrist's lies and that he will be the guarantor of a peace covenant that will see the Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. Antichrist will be believed and received as their savior until he proclaims himself as God and sets himself up as God in the Temple in the middle point of the seven-year period (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Daniel 9:27). It's interesting to think that Islam is also expecting a great prophet to arrive. They call him the Twelfth Imam or the Mahdi. My personal belief is that the Antichrist will not be a Muslim; if he were, the Jewish people would never accept him as their Messiah.

The Second Seal

³When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" ⁴Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the Earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword (Revelation 6:3-4).

The breaking of the second seal brings a second horse (v. 4). This Scripture is talking about war. This man of peace, the Antichrist, after he takes power, will bring about a series of conflicts. Compare this to Jesus' teaching to His disciples on the Mount of Olives:

⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (Matthew 24:6-7).

This conflict may be a war that starts when the Antichrist gains leadership of a ten-nation confederacy that brings the whole world under his control. Daniel prophesied of three nations or leaders brought into subjugation to him (Daniel 7:24). There is likely more than one war that takes place, for we read of wars (plural) and rumors of wars. It may also be the time when a nation situated to the far north of Israel will launch an attack on Israel (Ezekiel 38-39). Most commentators believe this nation to be Russia, allied with Persia (Iran), Turkey, Ethiopia, Sudan, and other countries, an attack that has not yet happened (Ezekiel 38:1-15, and 39:2). This attack occurs after a re-gathering of Jewish people from all nations back to the land of Israel (Ezekiel 38:7-9), an event happening in our day. There is no other day in history before the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 when this could be fulfilled so perfectly. God has been gathering the people of Israel back to their land, which is another sign of the last days. We can see how the scene is being set in our day for events that the Scriptures tell us are yet to come. Let's turn now to the breaking of the third seal:

The Third Seal

⁵When the Lamb opened the third seal; I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "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!" (Revelation 6:5-6).

The result of the wars at the beginning of the seven-year period, the seventieth week of Daniel, is that famine begins to take hold on the Earth. How will this happen? This lack of food could be the result of nuclear weapon fallout spreading over fields and destroying crops, but it could also be the consequence of globalist control of food, raising prices to manipulate and control countries dependent on the Antichrist's food supply and grain. Famine might also be the result of using food control *to force people* to take the Mark of the Beast:

¹⁶**It also forced all people**, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, ¹⁷so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name (Revelation 13:16-17).

Whatever the cause, a day's wage will only manage to buy enough food for the day for a small family. The pair of scales represents food being weighed and rationed. Barley was usually fed to animals and is low in nutrients, hence the lower price. In the Olivet discourse, Matthew also records Jesus saying that famines will follow the wars. He also adds that there will be earthquakes as well:

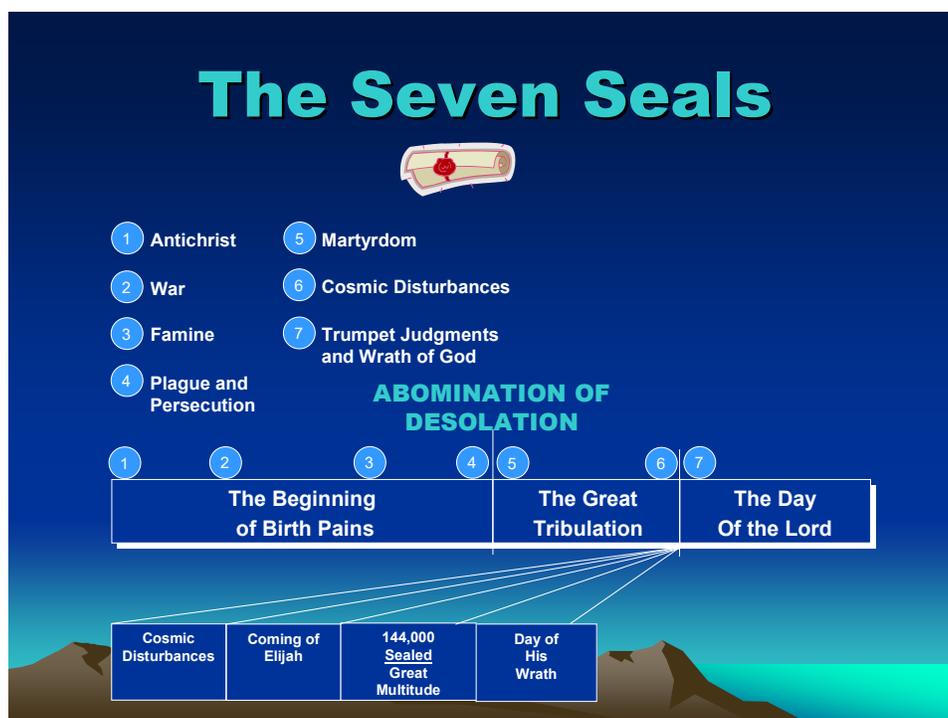
There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains (Matthew 24:7-8).

What are your thoughts about Jesus' words above that this is just the beginning stages of the birth pains? What was the Lord implying by using the analogy of birth pains? Think of how birth pains progress.

When talking prophetically about the wars that will take place before His second coming, Jesus said, **“Such things must happen, but the end is still to come”** (Matthew 24:6). He is letting us know that we are only in the beginning stages of what will happen. Christ called these preceding years the beginning of birth pains, likening the first three and a half years to the birth of a baby (v. 8). As the Earth gets closer to the coming of Christ, it is in the throes of hard labor. As in the birth of a baby, the destructive events are typical of hard labor with more painful contractions and each labor pain taking place one after the other in rapid succession.

The Fourth Seal

⁷When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" ⁸I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the Earth to kill by **sword**, **famine**, and **plague**, and by the **wild beasts** of the Earth (Revelation 6:7-8).



When the fourth seal is opened, we see that four different things acting together wipe out a quarter of Earth's population, which is currently over 8 billion people (May 2024). The four things causing death on a massive scale are sword, famine, pestilence or plague, and the wild beasts of the Earth accompanied by persecution.

The Greek word translated into English as “pale” for the color of the fourth horse is *chloros*, from where we get such English words as chlorine, chloroform, and chlorophyll. The term describes a greenish-yellow color that is characteristic of a decomposing corpse. Permission is given (“**They were given power,**” v. 8) for a fourth of the population of the Earth to be killed by the sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts. The rider on the back of the horse is named “Death,” which is another unique characteristic as it is the only rider that is named. The Greek word translated into English is the common word for death, *thánatos*. Still, this term could also be meant as death through pestilence or disease, for when Jesus described the things that preceded His coming, He said, “**And there will be famines** [third seal or horseman], **pestilences** [fourth seal or horseman], **and earthquakes in various places**” (Matthew 24:7). Matthew did not use the Greek word *thánatos* but *loimós*, the word translated as disease or pestilence. This fourth horse and rider brings death by pestilence or plague.

Let's think about each of the things that happen at the opening of the fourth seal. First, the passage states that some are killed by the sword (v. 8). We should not take that to mean that battles are going to be fought with swords; the sword speaks of death through violent means. Killed by sword sounds like a level of violence going on, resulting in people killing one another, possibly because of a breakdown of civil order due to a lack of food. Some have openly proposed a plan of intentional de-population, citing an ideal number of half a billion people. (For research, search for the topic of the Georgia Guide Stones).¹ From the 1960s, The World Bank, the U.N., and a host of independent American philanthropic foundations, such as the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, began to focus on what they saw as the problems of burgeoning population growth. They believed that overpopulation was the primary cause of environmental degradation, economic underdevelopment, and political instability. Let us not be naive in thinking that world leaders would never try to reduce their populations by using any means at their disposal.

The famine that started at the third seal is also continuing, and the plague also adds to the death of a quarter of the population. What could the epidemic be? Is this a further virus that breaks out on the Earth? What would happen if a more virulent pestilence or plague were to come? Martial law would be declared to contain the spread. Truckers would not want to go into affected areas, thus causing the famine to be worse. Our passage in Revelation also talks about people killed by wild beasts. How can that be possible in our day? In the Old Testament, God warned Israel that if they were unfaithful to Him, He would release four categories of death upon them, i.e., ²¹“**my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals!**” (Ezekiel 14:13-21).

While this passage may refer to wild animals, I suggest another interpretation of this word. The Greek word used is *thērión*, and although it is mainly used for animals, it could also be indicative of people who have let their inner beast nature dominate their lives to such a degree that they behave like wild beasts. When people dominated by selfish greed or hunger find themselves backed into a corner, they will act in a predatory manner out of a beast-like need for preservation, especially in a time of famine when men find it difficult to feed their families. Consider the two Scriptures below that speak of men behaving like beasts:

¹ <https://thesecrettruthabout.com/the-georgia-guidestones-mystery/>

I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts— men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords (Psalm 57:4, Emphasis added).

But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts, they too will perish (2 Peter 2:12).

Jesus also talked about what will happen on Earth at the time of the fourth seal. Turn again to Matthew's Gospel:

⁹"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be *hated by all nations* because of me. ¹⁰At that time *many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other*, ¹¹and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹²Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³but he who stands firm to the end will be saved [*sōthēsetai* translated *saved* here has several meanings, one of which is to be physically delivered]. ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:9-14).

Jesus prophesied that wickedness would increase (v. 12) and that the love of many would grow cold. What will cause wickedness to increase and the love of many to grow cold? What causes such things, and how is it creeping into our culture today?

Men betraying each other (v.10) sounds like individuals who are inwardly depraved and giving full vent to the beast side of their nature, persecuting anyone who will not go along with Antichrist's mark and his rule and reign. The Lord delivers His people out of the time of great persecution by snatching them up and out of it (v.13).

The Lord spoke of a time when all nations will hate true Bible believers for their stand for Christ (v. 9). This persecution of God's people will result in a mighty outpouring of the Spirit, I believe, that will bring about a great harvest of people saved as the gospel is proclaimed in power. Jesus spoke of a mighty revival move of the Spirit throughout the world in verse 14 that brings many to Christ. We can look at the opening of the seals as a terrifying time, but I believe many will come to Christ when they hear of the reality of Christ's miraculous work among the Church, healing and protecting His people in a multitude of ways. There is also an awakening to the reality that occult forces are at work in the world, which has caused the spiritual darkness that the world is enduring. Expect God to work wonders at this time when the seals are broken. The enemy will only have some things go according to his plan. The Church of that day will be powerful and entirely reliant on the Spirit. They will do exploits by the power of the Spirit of God:

And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he [The Antichrist] corrupt by flatteries: but the people that *do know their God* shall be strong, and *do exploits* (Daniel 11:32 KJV).

With flattery he [The Antichrist] will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but **the people who know their God** will firmly **resist him** (Daniel 11:32 NIV).

What does it mean to resist the enemy? Are you doing this day by day? Please ask yourself this question. Be sure to learn this vital lesson. As the days get darker, we who are Christ-followers are to shine brighter. John the apostle told us that the spirit of the Antichrist is already in the world! (1 John 4:3). Do you recognize it? What is your response to this evil spirit in your everyday life? We need to open our eyes to the deceptions of the enemy. Media is a strong influencer. Be mindful of what you see, hear, and speak, and do not comply with those who would bring you into the darkness of this world system. We live at a time in history when we need to fully align ourselves with our King, the Lord Jesus, and be led and empowered by His Spirit. His Kingdom will never pass away. His reign will endure, and we are being prepared as the Bride of Christ to be with Him. Do not fall asleep along with many in this world system but be ready for the coming of the Bridegroom. Let your heart attitude and prayer be: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Prayer: Father, our prayer is for You to mold us into fully committed disciples who are ready for Your coming. Open our eyes so that we can clearly see the spiritual warfare that is taking place. Awaken hearts everywhere and open the eyes of the blind to see You. We await Your wonderful coming, when all will be revealed, and we will see You in all your glory.

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