

The Four Horsemen

As each of the first four seals is opened in Revelation 6, one of the four creatures before the throne unleashes one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The number and coloring of the horses parallels Zechariah 1:8-10 and 6:1-7.

Also of interest is Dr. S.R. Driver's discovery in 1934 that among Arabs there are known four kinds of locusts—yellow, white, red and black. This fit as in Revelation 9:7, locusts are described as looking like horses ready for battle.



The First Horseman—sent forth to “thoroughly conquer” (which is probably the best translation of that expression). While this expression is often interpreted negatively with conquering bringing death to the vanquished, that is not the only possible interpretation. To conquer (*niké* in the Greek) is usually used by John in his writings to describe the faithful church overcoming those who oppose them (sometimes by being faithful unto death). This first rider can be interpreted positively as the triumph of the Gospel prior to the woes to come, which is underlined by giving this horseman a crown before he goes into battle showing that victory is assured.

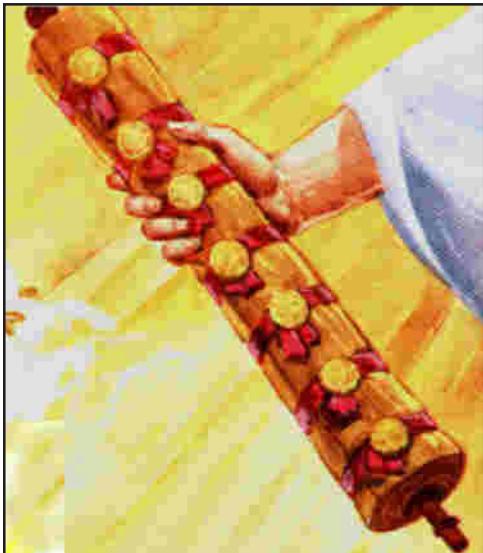
The Second Horseman—removes “peace” from the earth. This is likely the *pax romana*, the peace of man that comes through oppression rather than the intended *shalom* (peace, well-being, wholeness of God). But make no mistake, this removal of the man-made peace is catastrophic. Just as communist oppression held the violence of Bosnia at check, so the removal of this man-made peace does bring woe.

The Third Horseman—is ushered forth with the saying about the cost of wheat and barley rising with nothing happening to the wine and oil. The prices listed are roughly eight times the usual costs. One liter of wheat and three of Barley comes from the daily rations for a soldier and his horse. *Choinix* is the word in the Greek as its measure was roughly equivalent to a liter. The necessities of life are scarce while luxuries remain, as the oil and wine are unharmed.

The Fourth Horseman—His horse is sickly pale/literally a pale greenish gray associated with death. The horseman is personified Death and Hades follows after him.

The first horseman bears a bow, while the next three are the “arrows” of war, famine, and pestilence. With the unleashing of the Four Horsemen, comes authority over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague.

The Seven Seals



In Revelation 6:1-8:4, seven seals on a scroll are opened and with each we come closer to the end of the ages as death and destruction are unleashed on the earth. With the first four seals come the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. This is followed by the fifth seal revealing to John the souls of martyrs gathered under the altar awaiting the coming judgment on those who have killed them. They are given white robes and are told to rest. With the sixth seal come signs on the earth—a great shaking (probably, but not necessarily an earthquake), the sun goes black and the moon turns to blood (as in Joel 2:31, 3:4 and similar to Isaiah 13:10 and 50:3).

The heavens were seen as giving portents of what was to come in life and a blackened sun was a strong

symbol of something evil coming for all men. Ominous signs such as these in the heavens are common in apocalyptic literature.

One other possible resonance is that the seven churches are described as stars and now stars fall from heaven. While certainly not overtly predicting the destruction of the seven churches, it does open up the possibility that the churches could fall in the shaking that is to come.

The 144,000—The four angels hold back the wind and 144,000 are sealed with 12,000 from every tribe of Israel. This should be read alongside Ezekiel 9:4 in which some, but not all of Jerusalem's inhabitants are marked. The 144,000 seem to be on earth and in danger of peril, while there is an innumerable multitude in heaven. Those marked on the earth are saved from the wrath of God, though whether they will be saved from the wrath of the ungodly is not specifically promised. In either case, the 144,000 alludes to the Jewish military tradition found in the Old Testament of mustering armies composed of equal number of soldiers from each of the tribes (such as Numbers 31:4-6).

What is perhaps most significant is that in sealing this group with divine protection, Christians get the assurance that there will be a group of faithful who persevere to the end, as so provide a faithful witness to Jesus no matter what is to come.

The Innumerable Multitude—This group is made up of all the Christians who have died up to this point, including both martyrs and Christians who died naturally. We have the promise here that those who have already died are present to God.

The Seventh Seal—With this ultimate seal comes silence (Habakkuk 2:20, Zephaniah 1:7, Zechariah 2:13). Then a new group of seven is inaugurated with seven angels being given seven trumpets. The pattern of the seven trumpets will pick up in next week's study.