

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

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The Seven Seals -- Part 4 of 4

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Last month, I ran out of space just as I was about to discuss the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. It seems that the element people remember about the seven seals is the four horsemen. Let us review some important foundational issues, then examine the four horsemen of Revelation 6.

First, a proper understanding of the seven seals requires that we understand the *purpose* for which the book sealed with seven seals was written. It is the information within the book that gives the seven seals their importance and focus.

Second, as the seven seals are broken, it initiates a chronological process of events that satisfy the grand purposes for which the book was written. Third, Jesus is the only One in all the universe qualified to break each of the seven seals because He is omnipotent, omniscient, and has experienced the Second Death that reconciled humanity to God through His blood.

Last, as each seal is broken, a new dimension about the identity of Jesus is revealed.

Royal Horses and Royal Horsemen

The use of horses in the first four seals is not hard to understand when we remember a few things about ancient times. First, there were no telephones, faxes, satellites, high speed internet connections, televisions or radios in those days. Instead, kings sent "couriers" on fast horses throughout their kingdom to deliver laws, edicts, bulletins, policy directives and other information that were pertinent to the operation of their kingdom.

Couriers were frequently dispatched from the throne room on the king's own royal horses because his decree must not be delayed. Royal horses were especially bred and trained for long distance running.

For example, during the time of Queen Esther a decree was blindly issued by King Artaxerxes which allowed the Persians – at an appointed time – to kill all the Jews and take their possessions. Queen Esther learned about the plot and exposed Haman, who had wickedly masterminded the plan.

When King Artaxerxes discovered that he had been deceived and his decree granted the opportunity for Persians to kill his wife's people, he had Mordecai, the queen's uncle, send an emergency edict to all the Jews throughout his kingdom notifying them to take up arms and fight their enemies. **"Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the**

king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king. The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies . . . The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king's command. . ." (Esther 8:10-14)

Can you detect a certain parallel forming? Just as horsemen were dispatched from the throne room of Artaxerxes, so horsemen are dispatched from God's throne. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse are couriers who are sent throughout the world on behalf of The King of Kings!

Another parallel from the Bible that will help us understand the imagery of horses and how it is used in Revelation can be found in Zechariah 6. Notice that the color of each horse in Zechariah 6 is identical to the horse found in Revelation 6.

Zechariah writes, "I looked up again—and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains—mountains of bronze! The first chariot had red horses, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled—all of them powerful. I asked the angel who was speaking to me, 'What are these, my lord?' The angel answered me, 'These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south.' When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, 'Go throughout the earth!' So they went throughout the earth. Then he called to me, 'Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north.' " (Zechariah 6:1-8)

God revealed in a vision to the ancient prophet Zechariah how His work is accomplished throughout the Earth. God sends four living creatures (or spirits) who stand before His throne throughout the Earth to do His bidding.

These four living creatures were represented to Zechariah as horses going north, south, east and west. In this particular vision, their task was to restore peace "in the land of the north." The Bible reveals that God sends war (Leviticus 26:24,25; Jeremiah 15:3; Zechariah 1:19-21) and peace throughout the Earth as He deems appropriate.

The four living creatures appear to be the couriers of His will. Prior to Zechariah's day, God had destroyed Jerusalem because of its degeneracy. Later, when the 70 years of captivity were fulfilled, God sent peace to Israel. Peace in the "north country" indicates that God's anger has subsided. (The "north country" is the direction for the origin of God's wrath. See Isaiah 41, Jeremiah 1 and Jeremiah 50.)

Even though Zechariah does not specifically mention riders on the horses he saw, the point remains that the four living creatures who stand before the throne of God are represented to Zechariah as couriers described in four colors, the same four colors found in Revelation 6.

Please understand – these four living creatures are not horses. Rather, they are *represented* as horses (and riders) sent from the throne of God throughout the Earth.

Keep These Ideas In Mind

As you study each seal, try to keep these issues in mind when the seal broken: First, each courier leaves from God's throne room (Revelation 4 and 5). Second, as each living creature is given a mission or assignment, John is invited to observe the unique work of each courier.

This explains why the description of each horse and rider says something about their task and objective. Third, each living creature is given the power to accomplish all that he is commanded to do. Fourth, the story about the book sealed with seven seals is one of Revelation's prophecies because it uniquely resolves certain issues that God wants the final generation on Earth to understand.

Acts I, II and III

The first four seals are similar to preparing a stage for a drama. After the stage is set, the drama unfolds. The grand finale of the drama is when the final seal is broken. A person can outline the seven seals into three acts: Act I deals with how the global stage is prepared for the tribulation, Act II is the "test of worship," and Act III is a full disclosure of Jesus.

I am personally convinced that Jesus began opening the seals around 1798 and my explanation of the four horsemen falls within this time frame.

Seal #1 – Living Creature #1 ~ 1798

"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." (Rev 6:1,2)

Authorities of the Greek language have varying opinions about the bow in Rev 6:2. While some authorities maintain that the first horseman carries a bow in preparation for battle, I believe this bow is actually a winner's ribbon, that is, an ornamental bow made of fabric. He is also given a *stephanos*, that is, a laurel crown of victory (not a diadem or crown denoting authority or dominion as artists usually depict).

The Greek language in this passage indicates the work of this horseman takes awhile – "he went out overcoming that he might overcome." The breaking of this seal connects to a painful transition on Earth. For 1,260 years the Church of Rome had dominion over the nations of Europe using the doctrine that salvation is only possible through the receipt of sacraments administered by priests.

In 1793, a bloody revolution to overthrow the authority and oppression of the Church began in

France. With great sacrifice and enormous loss of life, France was able to expel the Church from its government. In 1798, Napoleon's forces captured the pope in Vatican City and put him into exile.

This "wound" to papal power in Europe gave Protestantism a window of opportunity to become a religious force in the world. Just 22 years earlier, in 1776, God provided a new nation where religious freedom was guaranteed. As a result of the work done by the first horseman, America became the champion of the Protestant movement and sent out more Christian missionaries, gospel workers and literature than any other nation on Earth.

The rider on this horse dispatched from Heaven's throne is still responsible for the promotion of "the good news" throughout Earth which is: **"Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone."** A crown of victory and a "winner's ribbon" is promised to everyone who receives the gospel into their heart and overcomes the sin in their life through faith. (2 Timothy 4:8)

The work of the first horseman will continue until the offer of salvation is terminated during the Great Tribulation.

Seal #2 - Living Creature #2 ~ 1800

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

The second horseman is given power to create controversy and cause bloodshed (war) all over the Earth. The large sword represents the Bible, the sword of truth. (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17) The Bible will, during the Great Tribulation, become the root source of a global controversy that leads to bloodshed. The power to create controversy and cause bloodshed culminates during Act II, the breaking of the fifth seal (this is when the martyrdom of millions of saints occurs).

The inhabitants of this world need to be prepared for this horrible drama, so the second horseman from God's throne is charged with the translation and distribution of the Bible throughout the world. Bible Societies in the USA, as well as Europe, began in the nineteenth century and are a testimony to the work of this royal horseman.

At the present time, this horseman continues to prompt people to spread the Word of God in every country of the world. A copy (or portions) of God's Word has been made available to approximately 66% of the world's population in 200 years. During this time the Bible has been printed in such vast numbers that no book on Earth begins to approach it in terms of quantity.

Seal #3 - Living Creature #3 – 1844

"When 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. Then 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!' " (Rev 6:5,6)

The third courier sent out from God's throne carries a *message* throughout the Earth. I believe the scales indicate that a pre-Advent judgment of man has begun. Remember the frightening words written on the wall at Belshazzar's feast? ". . . **You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.**" (Daniel 5:27)

God weighs the actions of men and women against their understanding of right and wrong. This is how God judges man. For prophetic reasons beyond the scope of this article, I believe Jesus began reviewing and making executive decisions regarding humanity in 1844.

Beginning with those individuals who have died, He decides who will be saved and who must be destroyed. The work of the third horseman is to see that an understanding of Christ's work in Heaven's temple is understood and promoted around the world. As this horseman leaves the throne room, Jesus says: "**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!**"

These words are a promise of wages to everyone who joins in promoting the message of the third courier. These words are borrowed from the days when Solomon offered the servants of Hiram wages to gather material for constructing the temple in Jerusalem. "**I will give your servants, the woodsmen who cut the timber, twenty thousand cors of ground wheat, twenty thousand cors of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine and twenty thousand baths of olive oil.**" (2 Chronicles 2:10)

The parallel is obvious. The people who labor on projects that God has ordained are generously paid. The Lord, the King of the universe and Earth owns the whole Earth and its contents. He is faithful with those who choose to serve Him. For a more comprehensive study on the pre-Advent judgment of man and its timing, please read chapters 8-12 in my book, *The Revelation of Jesus*.

Seal #4 - Living Creature #4 – Imminent

"When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, 'Come!' I 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." (Rev 6:7,8)

This courier from Heaven brings the Great Tribulation to Earth. He implements the horrible destruction of 1.5 billion people (25% of Earth's population). He uses God's four deadly judgments – sword, famine, plague and wild beasts – to accomplish the slaughter.

Notice how God used these deadly judgments upon ancient Israel: "**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!" (Ezekiel 14:12)

A casual review of the Old Testament proves that God sends these four deadly judgments on humankind when His patience with them produces no redemptive effect. When we reach a point of no return, God sends overwhelming destruction to deal with the runaway locomotive of degeneracy. (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 32, Ezekiel 14)

The sudden and horrific destruction of 1.5 billion people will certainly get the attention of the survivors. In this desperate setting, how to worship God will become the focal point of a great controversy among all nations. This also explains how the issue of worship separates the people on Earth into two camps – those who obey the laws of God and those who obey the traditions of men.

The Stage Has Been Set

Remember, the seven seals are like a three-part drama. The four horsemen (the breaking of the first four seals) prepare a global stage. Act II ushers in events surrounding the breaking of the fifth seal. To the surprise of many Christians, the fifth seal describes a time when even saints will be martyred.

Notice why they perish: **"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."** (Rev 6:9) The saints are martyred because they obey God's Word and remain steadfast in their faith to follow the testimony of Jesus! (See also Revelation 13:15.)

Act III

"They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?' " (Revelation 6:16,17) As Jesus approaches Earth at the second coming to deal with His enemies, the sixth seal is broken.

The wicked run for cover when they see the majesty and glory of the sinless One they so despised. The time for mercy has passed and Jesus slays every one of them. (Revelation 19:19-21)

The Grand Finale

The last or seventh seal is broken at the end of the 1,000 years when everyone who has ever lived will be resurrected and stand before the Great White Throne. Since most of the Earth's population did not participate in the Great Tribulation (only the final generation on Earth experiences the Great Tribulation), billions of people have no idea what occurred on Earth while they were dead.

This is the moment God has been waiting for; the moment to reveal the contents of the Book of Life. As the seventh seal is opened, God will be exonerated. God will show to everyone who has received life from Him that He (a) foreknew the choices of everyone, and (b) gave everyone the freedom to exercise that choice.

God will give a full account of His judgment upon every person and every person will give a full accounting to His Maker. Upon seeing God's love, fairness and benevolence, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that God has been more than fair. All created beings will understand that Jesus, the exalted Son of God, loved His creation so much that He was willing to perish to save sinners.

As this revelation grips every heart, every mouth will confess that Jesus is to be praised above everyone else for He is an Almighty God!

Let me close this study on the seven seals with this bit of irony: Sooner or later, every knee will bow before the love, righteousness and wisdom of Jesus. Those who bow while salvation is available will enjoy life without end and those who refuse to bow are no different than those who refused to get in the ark in Noah's day.

(Did you read [Part 1](#) first? Okay, on to [Part 3](#))