

WORSHIP SERVICE - 9.12.2021

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

I. INTRODUCTION

MAIN POINT: Christ has already begun to execute judgment on the world in anticipation of the future and final judgment in which God's people will be fully vindicated.

Revelation 6:1-8

Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4 And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

II. PORTENTS OF FINAL JUDGMENT

1. OLD TESTAMENT CONNECTION

- The imagery of horses and riders comes from **Zechariah ch1 & 6**
- Through a series of visions that were given to Zechariah the priest, God's people were to be encouraged and reminded that, even though things don't look that great at the moment, there are things happening in the unseen realm. God was at work and he would fulfill his promises to restore them.
- In fact, two of the visions reveal that God has special envoys who are patrolling the earth and they see everything and are reporting it to the Lord. He is not unaware of the plight of his people and the wicked will be punished.

Zechariah 1:8-11

“I saw in the night, and behold, **a man riding on a red horse!** He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were **red, sorrel, and white horses**. 9 Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’ 10 So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘**These are they whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth.**’ 11 And they answered the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, ‘**We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.**’

12 Then the angel of the Lord said, ‘O Lord of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?’ 13 And the Lord answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. 14 So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. 15 **And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster.** 16 Therefore, thus says the Lord, **I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it,** declares the Lord of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. 17 Cry out again, Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.”

Zechariah 6:1-8

Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, **four chariots** came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. 2 The first chariot had **red horses**, the second **black horses**, 3 the third **white horses**, and the fourth chariot **dappled horses**—all of them **strong**. 4 Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” 5 And the angel answered and said to me, “**These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth.**

6 The chariot with the **black horses** goes toward the north country, the **white ones** go after them, and the **dappled ones** go toward the south country.” 7 **When the strong horses came out, they were impatient to go and patrol the earth.** And he said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth. 8 Then he cried to me, “Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country.”

- Horses and riders are symbols in Scripture of God’s judgment being executed.
- They are providential agents and instruments of God’s justice.

2. AGENTS OF THE LAMB

- The first four seals are grouped together. It is something that is happening simultaneously.
- This is the pattern:
 - Lamb breaks the seal
 - One of the four living creatures utters the command, “Come!”
 - A horse is unveiled along with his color
 - Then the rider is sent out into the earth along with a description and his assigned task
- Whatever these riders signify in terms of judgment, it is clear that they are being dispatched by the Lamb.
- We are told that each has been given a measure of authority to execute something contained in the scroll.
 - “Was given...” v2

- “Was permitted...” v4
 - “Was given authority...” v8
- Because these events begin right after the Lamb takes the scroll and his rightful place at the right hand of God, we can say that the end times has been inaugurated.
 - Judgment has begun and will continue until the full and final judgment on the Day of the Lord.
 - The judgments contained in the scroll vividly portray all that is working together in human history that will bring about the consummation of the kingdom of Christ.
 - These four horsemen then are portents of the final and ultimate judgment.
 - They foreshadow final judgment as they execute partial judgment now.
 - They are providential forces of judgment that are galloping across the world and the entire scene of human history during this entire period between the ascension and the Second Coming of the Lord.
 - These four horsemen are riding today!
 - What we have to come to grips with as the people of God is the reality that Christ rules over this seemingly chaotic and confusing world with all of its trouble and that destructive events that we see in our world are brought about by Christ not only for judicial purposes, but also for redemptive purposes.

III. THE FOUR HORSEMEN

- There are four horses and riders, four being the number of creaturely order and completeness.
- Their effect extends to all of humanity - the four corners of the earth.
- Christ’s followers are not exempt from their reach and will suffer as they gallop across the earth in whatever trial the Lamb has decreed for his people.
- **G.K. Beale**, reminds us that, *“The horses signify that natural and political disasters throughout the world are caused by Christ in order to judge unbelievers who persecute Christians, and in order to vindicate his people. Such vindication demonstrates His love for them and His justice and may already be an anticipatory answer to the cry for vengeance in 6:9-11.”*
- V9 Martyrs cry out, “how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who swell on the earth?”
- The judgments are therefore punitive and purifying. They punish the wicked and purify the saints of God.

FIRST SEAL - CONQUEST

Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” 2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

- Who is the rider? Some believe this refers to Jesus.
 - He is riding out with the gospel, and as the gospel advances, he is conquering.
 - Interpretation comes from Rev. 19 though it is hard to make this connection.
- The rider is not Jesus but is an agent of Jesus to bring about partial judgment in the world.

- He is given authority and he comes out conquering, and to conquer ("bent on conquering").
- And he is given a victor's crown which shows that he is always successful. He is victorious.
- The bow is a symbol of warfare.
- Military conquest is likely what is in view here.
- There is also spiritual conquest in view.
- This rider could also signify spiritual deception—false christs, anti-christs.
- Jesus warns his followers of this, **Matthew 24:4-5** And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.
- **1 John 2:18** Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.
- Satan is intent on deceiving people and destroying the church.
- But the Lamb can and does use the nefarious purposes of Satan to punish the wicked and to purify and refine the saints.

SECOND SEAL - BLOODSHED

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4 And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

- This rider is given power to take peace from the earth. He stirs up strife among people and nations.
- What happens when peace is removed, man's sinful nature is unrestrained so that they will slay one another.
- He's given a great sword, a large sword, so his reach is extensive.
- This rider is a symbol of persecution in addition to the general bloodshed that marks humanity.
- **Matthew 10:34-36** "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.
- The gospel will offend some and it will lead to Christ's people being persecuted.
- Christians should expect persecution and be ready to pay the ultimate price for their allegiance to Christ.

THIRD SEAL - FAMINE

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"

- With the breaking of this seal, a voice is heard from the midst of the four living creatures.
- Who is speaking? It is the Lamb! Further underscoring that the commands issued to the four horseman are coming from the divine throne of God.
- This rider gallops across the earth bringing famine.
- He has a pair of scales in his hand. We see scales as the scales of justice but in ancient times, a scale was used to measure food.

- Scales were used in times of scarcity to precisely measure out food as it was rationed.
- Ezekiel 4 - in exile, God's people would be facing scarcity as a punishment.
- **Ez. 4:16** Moreover, he said to me, "Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay."
- But what is in view is not just famine, but the inflated cost of necessities.
- A quart of wheat, which would feed a family for a day, would cost a day's wage. Three quarts of the less expensive grain, barley, would last a few days but still cost a day's wage. This was about an 800% increase.
- The voice gives boundaries, restrictions.
- "And do not harm the oil and wine!" - these are the more luxurious goods. Not the necessities or the essentials. They would only be accessible to the wealthy and the rest would spend their entire income on the basics.
- While famines affect everyone, believers would suffer more when their are limited food supplies. They will not be allowed to have access to the basic necessities of life.
- Christians can in these expect to lose jobs, income, and other material things, for their allegiance to Christ.

FOURTH SEAL - DEATH

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

- Pale, Greek, "chlōros", pale green, the sickly color of a decaying corpse.
- Death is galloping hard throughout the world with the grave following after.
- Death comes through a variety of means. In view here is pestilence or plagues.
- Ezekiel 14 lists these very same things as weapons wielded by God to bring judgment on his enemies.
- Death is not limited to these four things. The point is that death, by whatever means it comes, can be an expression of God's judgment on his enemies and as a means to purify his people.
- **Revelation 1:18** I am "the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."
- All of these satanic forces are under the domain, authority, and command of the throne room of God!
- Death for the believer is the pathway to eternal rewards.
- What does a suffering, persecuted believer have to fear? Nothing!

IV. CONCLUSION

- With the exclusion of the themes of final judgment and the new heavens and the new earth, the content of Revelation has been fulfilled, is being fulfilled, and will be fully and finally fulfilled.
- Christ has already begun to execute his holy vengeance by bringing judgment through these four agents.
- He is vindicating his people and will fully vindicate his people as promised.