

## **“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”** (Revelation 6:1-8)

### **Introduction**

The fury and thunder of their hoof beats has been anticipated for centuries. The harbingers of deception, destruction, deprivation and death; the world has resisted their coming. Yet come they will. In 1983 Billy Graham addressed their coming in his book *Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. There he wrote, “the shadows of all four horsemen can already be seen galloping throughout the world at this moment” (p. 9). Dr. Graham is right. Their shadow looms large and they could appear at any time.

The mass murderer Charles Manson identified the Beatles as the 4 Horsemen. As great as their influence was and is, it will pale in comparison to what the world will experience when these 4 come riding into town.

Revelation 6-19 contains the heart of the end-time “Day of the Lord.” It is also called the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7), Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week (Daniel 9:27) and the 7 year tribulation. Though the rapture is never specifically addressed in Revelation, it is my judgment that it occurs before Revelation 6. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 says we are not destined for the wrath of the Day of the Lord.

The 4 horsemen introduce us to the 1<sup>st</sup> of God’s 3 series of judgements in Revelation: the seal judgements, located in chapter 6, the trumpets in chapters 8 & 9, and the bowls in chapters 15 & 16. It is interesting to note there is a telescopic relationship to the judgments with each successive series coming out of the last of the former. In other words, the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is the 7 trumpets and the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet is the 7 bowls. This would indicate an increase both in rapidity and intensity as the judgements unfold. Furthermore, because we have good warrant for seeing the first 4 seals as constituting the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 7 year tribulation, the bulk of the judgments will occur in the final 3 ½ years. It will indeed be a time of great sorrow and suffering.

As we investigate the 4 horsemen it is interesting to note their Old Testament background in Zechariah 1:8-15; 6:1-8, Ezekiel 14:12-23, especially verse 21, and even Leviticus 26:18-28. But it is imperative that we note the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 24:5-8, Mark 13:7-9 and Luke 21:9-12. What we discover is a remarkable parallelism between the two [read Matthew 24:1-8]. And, the fact that in Matthew 24:8 Jesus says, “All these are the beginning of sorrows,” must be carefully considered. Because of our Lord’s statement, I believe we have good reason to see the 4 horsemen as constituting “the beginning of sorrows,” the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 7 year tribulation. They represent, therefore, world trends and conditions which will develop during the first 3 ½ years.

### **Transition**

As they ride, what do we learn?

#### **I. Be aware of God’s weapon of deception.**

**6:1-2**

**(The White Horse)**

The heavenly throne-room vision of chapters 4 – 5 set the stage for the opening of the seals and the coming of the 4 horsemen. By virtue of creation (ch. 4) and redemption (ch. 5), God has the right to judge a world in rebellion against Him and His sovereignty.

**1. Deception is under God's control.****6:1**

The Lamb of chapter 4 opens the seals. He is in charge. He is in control. This is His doing!

One of the living creatures with a voice like thunder – (cf. 4:5) the voice comes from heaven's throne. The thunder speaks of authority, judgment and impending storm. He simply and directly commands, come (pre. imp.).

“Events will now take place on earth because of God's sovereign direction in heaven” (Wiersbe, 62). These riders may have evil intent, they may indeed visit the world with devastation, disaster, destruction, and death, but rest assured, ALL IS ULTIMATELY UNDER THE SOVEREIGN CONTROL OF GOD. They come because He sends them!

**2. Deception is determined to conquer.****6:2**

Note carefully the description of the 1<sup>st</sup> rider.

White horse – victory and conquest.

Bow – weapon of the feared Parthians of John's day, but note: no arrows! He will conquer peacefully.

Crown (*stephanos*) was given – he has the victor's crown and he did not have to take it. It was given to him (not so much by men as by God! [Beale, 377]).

“He goes out surely or certainly to conquer” (a semitic idiom).

Who is the rider?

- |               |                       |                                      |
|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1) Christ     | 2) Advancing gospel   | 3) Apollo (false religions)          |
| 4) Antichrist | 5) Spirit of conquest | 6) Government persecuting Christians |

7) Devil's servants in general.

\*This is not the rider of 19:11ff, the Lord Jesus – different purposes, crowns, weapons (bow vs. sword), and time of coming.

\*The best view is the evil spirit of conquest embodied in the counterfeit Christ, the Antichrist (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3-4). He is an evil deceptive (white horse!) rider who keeps company with war, famine and death. Further, Jesus warned us first in Matthew 24:5ff to be on guard concerning deception and False Christ.

**Application**

\*The ultimate battle is always between truth and error, that which is real and that which is false. There will be great spiritual deception then (in the realm

of the social and political!). There is great deception today. It separates the true from the fake, it reveals the genuine article and the real deal.

### Transition

Be aware of God's weapon of deception. It is a sure indication of who truly is your Lord.

## **II. Be aware of God's weapon of destruction. 6:3-4** (The Red Horse)

The peace promised and provided by this conquering deceiver will be short-lived. He promises, as Satan always does, far more than he can deliver. The rider on the white horse carried a bow and no arrows. The rider on the red horse of war carries a sword of death and destruction.

### **1. Destruction is inevitable. 6:3**

Christ remains in control as the 2<sup>nd</sup> seal is opened. What he opens no one can shut or stop. The 2<sup>nd</sup> living creature, in response to Christ's sovereign action, beckons the 2<sup>nd</sup> rider: Come (pre. imp.). The red horse of war inevitably will follow the white horse of conquest.

### **2. Destruction is immense. 6:4**

The color of the 2<sup>nd</sup> horse rightly depicts his mission of bloodshed and slaughter. But note: he takes the peace but the people kill one another. The word kill means to slaughter and seems to convey civil strife within and between peoples and nations. The word for sword would support this for it speaks of a hidden dagger. Assassination and civil unrest, riots in the streets and rebellion against authority will run rampant. No one will be safe. One will live in constant fear of life not knowing who to trust. Jesus said in Matthew 24:10, "many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another." No one will be excluded. He takes peace from the earth. Anarchy and worldwide bloodshed are signatures of the last days.

### Illustration

- 1) General Omar Bradley said in an Armistice Day speech in 1948, "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount .... The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants."
- 2) *During World War II, Albert Einstein helped bring a German photographer to the United States. They became friends, and the photographer took a number of pictures of Einstein. One day he looked into the camera and started talking. He spoke about his despair that his formula,  $E=mc^2$ , and his letter to President Roosevelt had made the atomic bomb possible, and his scientific research had resulted in the death of so many human beings. He grew silent. His eyes had a look of immense sadness. There was a question and a reproach in them. At that very moment the cameraman released the shutter. Einstein looked up and the cameraman asked him, "So you don't believe that there will ever be*

peace?” “No,” he answered. “As long as there will be man, there will be wars.”

**III. Be aware of God’s weapon of deprivation. 6:5-6**  
**(The Black Horse)**

War has a close companion, an ever-present partner. Its name is famine. Conquest, war, famine: these three tend to show up at the same party together. William and Paul Paddock warned in their book *Famines – 1975*, “Today hungry nations, tomorrow starving nations.” Revelation teaches us tomorrow could come any day.

**1. Famine is unstoppable. 6:5**

Christ opens the 3<sup>rd</sup> seal and the 3<sup>rd</sup> living creature commands, come (pre. imp.). John looks and behold the black horse of famine with its rider holding scales or balances in his hand rides onto the stage of history. Christ has released the black horse and no one or thing can deter it. It is coming. It is unstoppable.

**2. Famine will be unbearable. 6:6**

A quart of wheat for a denarius. A quart of wheat was approximately the amount necessary to sustain one person for one day. Barley was the poor man’s wheat and it was normally fed to animals. It was low in nutritional value and occasionally mixed with wheat. A denarius was basically a day’s wage. In other words a man would work all day for just enough wheat to sustain him, or enough barley to barely keep his family alive. Inflation prices are 10-16 times above normal according to prices cited by Cicero for wheat sold in Sicily (Beasley-Murray, 133).

The phrase do not harm the oil and wine is less clear as to its meaning. Some see the phrase as setting a limit on the deprivation caused by the horse of famine. Others argue that oil and wine were the commodities of the wealthy. It may be that both interpretations are likely. Food for the poor will be scarce and in short supply, while luxuries for the wealthy will not be harmed. Oil and wine will be affordable only by the more affluent. Though they are normally purchased by rich and poor alike, in this day they are a luxury most cannot afford.

**Illustration**

The black horse of famine is just around the corner, yet the darkness of his shadow already drapes our world.

In October 1998, Southern Baptists gathered at Ridgecrest, North Carolina for a World Hunger Consultation. Steve Nelson, *ERLC director of hunger concerns*, noted, “*In terms of human life, this is our most pressing issue.*” *Compared to the total number of infants who have been killed in the 25 years since the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, Nelson said an equal number of people will die in just 25 months from hunger and*

*hunger-related illnesses. “Hunger ministry is one of the keys to revival for the American church,” Nelson said, “and a key to revival in our world.” Globally, children comprise the vast majority of the 15 – 18 million people who die of hunger and hunger-related, yet preventable and treatable diseases each year, with 500,000 to 1 million of them literally starving to death. More than 75 percent of the world’s most impoverished adults and children live among people groups still unreached by the gospel. “Or Lord Jesus Christ was always involved in ministry evangelism, “Bill Cashion of the IMB said, and “if we’re to obey the Word of God, we dare not ignore human need.”*

*Jeff Palmer, an International Mission Board agricultural missionary in the Philippines, recounted an oft-cited analogy of the world as a village of 1,000 people, 564 of whom would be Asians with only 60 North Americans. Of the 1,000, 60 people would possess half the income; 500 would be hungry; 600 would live in shanty towns; and 700 would be illiterate, Palmer said.*

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, said on April 16, 1953, “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some 50 miles of concrete highway. We pay for a single fighter plane with a half million bushels of wheat. This, I repeat, is the best way of life to be found on the road the world has been taking. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”

### **Transition**

Be aware of God’s weapon of deprivation, the black horse of famine.

#### **IV. Be aware of God’s weapon of death. 6:7-8**

##### **(The Pale Horse)**

*At 78, B.F. Skinner shocked the American Psychological Association Convention (1982) by asking in understandable anger and anguish, “Why are we not acting to save the world? Is there to be much more history at all?” Asked afterward, “Has the observer of social conditioning lost his optimism?” his reply was, “I have ... When I wrote Beyond Freedom and Dignity, I was optimistic about the future. ... It is a very depressing way to end one’s life .... The argument that we have always solved our problems in the past and shall, therefore, solve this one is like reassuring a dying man by pointing out that he has always recovered from his illness” (Philadelphia Inquirer, 25 September 1982).*

On this issue Skinner saw things straight out. The potential for global homicide now stares humanity in the face. We await the pale horse of death.

1. **Death is controlled.**

6:7

As with the 3 previous riders, this horse comes forth at the permission of the Lamb of God and with the command of one of the living creatures. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 10:28, “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Death is God’s prerogative today. It will be His prerogative in the Tribulation.

2. **Death will be comprehensive.**

6:8

John looks and sees the pale horse, the ashen-green color of a decomposing corpse. Its rider is Death, that which claims the body. Following close behind is its ever-ready companion Hades, that which claims the soul. The death which is visited upon the earth is comprehensive in its numbers: 1/4 of the earth. It is also comprehensive in its nature: it kills with the sword (cf. v. 4), with hunger (cf. v. 6), with death and by the beasts of the earth.

In 1800 the world reached 1 billion in population.

In 1930 the world reached 2 billion in population.

In 1960 the world reached 3 billion in population.

In 1974 the world reached 4 billion in population.

In 1987 the world reached 5 billion in population.

In 1999 (Oct. 12 to be precise!) the world reached 6 billion in population.

There is some debate about what lies in the future. Some see a slow-down or even a decline. Others say we will reach 7 billion by 2013, 8 billion by 2027, and 9 billion by 2053.

Think about it. In less than 4 years, 1.5 billion people will depart planet earth not by rapture, but by death. Later in Rev. 8:18, because of the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet, 1/3 of those remaining will die. In less than 7 years, 1/2 of the world’s population will be taken by the “grim reaper!” (cf. Ezekiel 14:21). In a world decimated by war and famine, even the wild beast will join in the carnage. Sound far-fetched and beyond reality? Not really.

George Barna, in *The Second Coming of the Church*, 1998, said, “The world around us is changing at an unprecedented pace. What worked 10 years ago is already obsolete; cultural analysts estimate that our culture essentially reinvents itself every three to five years. In other words, the core attributes of our society – language, customs, dress styles, dominant leisure pursuits, relational emphases, values, and the like – are being substantially reconfigured every few years .... Because [of this],

[because] people are intensely seeking spiritual direction, and [because] our central moral and spiritual trends are engulfed in a downward spiral, we have no more than a half-decade to turn things around.”

### **Conclusion**

In his book, *Death in the City*, the late Francis Schaeffer said of our modern world, “the dust of death” [is] upon everything (p. 21). His diagnosis is correct and the dust will only grow thicker until our great God has accomplished His purpose. However, we should not fret. He is in control. He will determine, to the last detail, history’s consummation. He will orchestrate each and every event according to His perfect plan. God has such a plan for the world. God has such a plan for you. Let Him who is taking the world to its appropriate end do the same for you. The way may not be easy, but I promise you: you will not be disappointed.