

The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

Study 31

THE BEGINNING OF THE END; THE FIRST FOUR SEALS

Revelation 6:3-4 (NKJV)

³ *When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see."*

⁴ *Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.*

The world's euphoric mood of peace and harmony will be rudely shattered as the second horse and rider appear on the scene.

Just as world war 2 followed the deceptive peace promoted by Hitler, so devastating wars will spread throughout the world following the collapse of Antichrist's false peace.

Here the story turns ugly and remains that way until the true King returns to establish His kingdom.

Breaking The Second Seal

As the Lamb **broke the second seal** John **heard the second living creature** summoning the second horseman, **saying, "Come."**

Immediately **a red horse went out. Red**, the color of fire and blood, depicts war. God's judgment descends and the short-lived, false peace led by Antichrist dissolves in a bloody holocaust.

John first notes here that to the rider, **to him, it was granted to take peace from the earth.**

All that happens will be under God's sovereign control. He allows the false peace, and He ends it and brings war on the earth.

Contrary to the teachings of some, the judgments do not reflect the wrath of men or the wrath of Satan; they can only express God's wrath poured out on the world.

It is He who holds the seven-sealed scroll and the Lamb who unrolls it.

Sometime early in the first half of the Tribulation, during the beginning of the birth pains;

Matthew 24:8 (NKJV)

⁸ *All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

Mark 13:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ *But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.*

⁸ *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.*

Luke 21:9 (NKJV)

⁹ *But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately."*

World peace turns to worldwide conflict as **peace** vanishes from **the earth**.

Men will **slay one another** on an unprecedented scale.

Violent slaughter will become commonplace. While scripture does not give the details, the advances in modern weaponry suggest a terrible, unimaginable holocaust.

John also noted that **a great sword was given to the rider**. *Machaira (sword)* refers to the short, stabbing sword a Roman soldier carried into battle. It also was used by assassins.

The vision depicts a **great** sword to describe the extent of the war.

Antichrist's false peace will dissolve in a maelstrom of battle, assassination, rebellion, revolt and massacre.

As he was prominent in promoting the false peace, the antichrist will play a major role in the wars that follow it.

Though antichrist was the chief promoter of the false peace, when war breaks out all over the world he will have no choice but to resort to war himself in order to preserve his authority and power.

Antichrist will be as skillful at war as he was at promoting false peace;

We have a description of his career as a warrior;

Daniel 8:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, And shall prosper and thrive; He shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people.

Among his victims will be many of God's people

Revelation 6:9 (NKJV)

⁹ When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

Matthew 24:9 (NKJV)

⁹ Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

In other words he will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform his will ; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people.

Antichrist's setting up of the abomination of desolation, will touch of a massive conflict, described in detail by Daniel;

Daniel 11:36-45 (NKJV)

³⁶ "Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done.

³⁷ He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all.

³⁸ But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall

honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things.

³⁹ *Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, and advance its glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain.*

⁴⁰ *"At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through.*

⁴¹ *He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon.*

⁴² *He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape.*

⁴³ *He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels.*

⁴⁴ *But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many.*

⁴⁵ *And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him.*

As the head of the Western confederacy, Antichrist, as noted above will initially portray himself as a champion of peace. He will even appear to do what no one has been able to do, bring peace to the troubled Middle East

He will make a treaty with Israel, posing as their protector and defender. But all too soon his true colors will show, and his desire for dominance will provoke rebellion.

Antichrist's attempts to crush his enemies and rule them with an iron hand will touch off wars that will last throughout the remainder of the Tribulation.

Finally when earth's true King, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns, Antichrist will be cast into the lake of fire forever.

Revelation 20:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ *The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

The wars that begin with the opening of the second seal will last for the brief remaining time before the coming of the millennial kingdom.

Breaking The Third Seal

Revelation 6:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ *When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.*

⁶ *And I heard 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 the wine."*

As the Lamb **broke the third seal**, the mighty voice of the **third living creature** heralded the coming of the third horse and rider.

John's use of the **behold** reveals how startled and shocked he was by the rider's ominous appearance. The color **black** is associated with famine in Lamentations:

Lamentations 5:10 (KJV)

¹⁰ *Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.*

Famine is a logical consequence of worldwide war as food supplies are destroyed and those involved in food production are killed.

Jesus also predicted this future famine in Matt;

Matthew 24:7 (NKJV)

⁷ *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.*

God has used famine as a means of judgment in the past; (*Lev 26:26; Duet 32:24; 2Kings 8:1; Ps 105:16; Isa 3:1; Jer 16:4; Ezek 4:16-17; 5:16; 14:13; Hag 1:11*)

This will be the most devastating famine in all of human history.

The **pair of scales** the rider carried **in his hand** pictures the rationing that will result from the famine.

As in the United States during the depression, in Europe in the aftermath of World War 2, and today in many war-torn third world nations, there will be starving people standing in food lines.

But they will not find enough food to live on, as the fourth seal in John's vision reveals.

Following the appearance of the black horse and its rider, John **heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures.**

Since the **four living creatures** were stationed around the throne (*4:6*), this is likely the voice of God, the One sitting on the throne. (*4:2-3*).

God also speaks in connection with the fifth seal (6:11)

He speaks here as a reminder that the famine is a direct judgment from Him.

God's pronouncements reveal how devastating the famine conditions will be.

A quart of wheat is barely enough to sustain one person for one day, while the denarius represents one day's wages for an average worker.

People's labor will barely provide enough food for themselves and not enough to feed their families.

Those with families will be able to purchase **three quarts of barley for a denarius.**

That will provide food for their families, but barley was low in nutritional value and commonly fed to livestock.

Thus a person's wages will barely feed three people with low quality food.

Both of those scenarios represent starvation wages and signify severe famine conditions

In light of those extreme conditions, God cautions people **not** to damage (waste) **the oil and the wine.**

These are basic food staples. And these staples will become priceless luxuries.

Olive **oil** and **wine** used in the preparation and cooking of food, as well as the purification of water, will need to be carefully protected.

A deceptive peace followed by worldwide wars and a resultant devastating global famine will combine to escalate the universal chaos.

All this will take place during the first half of the Tribulation, while the worst will be yet to come.

Breaking The Fourth Seal

Revelation 6:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ *When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see."*

⁸ *So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.*

The fourth seal in the vision follows the pattern of the first three.

The **Lamb** broke the **seal** and the **fourth living creature** summoned the fourth horse and is rider.

John described the final horse as **an ashen horse**. *Chloros* (**ashen**) from which the English words "chlorophyll" and "chlorine" derive, refers to a sickly, pale, yellow-green color.

It describes green vegetation in its only other New Testament uses (*Rev 8:7; 9:4*)

The horses color vividly portrays the pale-green pallor of death characteristic of the decomposition of a corpse.

Fittingly the rider **who sat on it had the ominous name Death**.

Death on a massive scale is the inevitable consequence of widespread war and famine. In this terrifying scene, John saw **Hades following with death**.

Hades here representing the grave, becomes as it were the grave digger, burying the remains of Death's victims.

The extent of the death and destruction wrought by war and famine is then quantified:

Authority was given to death and Hades to destroy a fourth of the population of the earth.

At the worlds current population of nearly 6 billion, that would amount to the staggering total of almost 1.5 billion deaths.

In an age of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, such a total is terrifyingly plausible.

Death will use four tools in his grim task;

The **sword, famine, and pestilence, wild animals**

Sword - War

Famine = famine

Pestilence = disease

Wild animals = those that feed on death as well as carry disease

Throughout human history, disease has killed people on a far more massive scale than war.

More union and confederate soldiers died from disease during the Civil War than were killed in battle.

An estimated 30 million people died during the great influenza epidemic of 1918-19, more than three times as many as the estimated 8.5 million soldiers who died in battle during World War 1.

In addition several million more died about the same time in an outbreak of typhus in Russia, Poland and Romania

In a world ravaged by war and famine, it is inevitable that such disease will be widespread.

At first glance, the inclusion of **wild beasts** with war, famine and disease seems puzzling, since most creatures dangerous to man are either extinct or isolated in unpopulated regions.

But one explanation may be that the most deadly creature of all, the rat, thrives in all populated areas.

Rats have been responsible for uncounted millions of deaths throughout history, both by eating food supplies, and especially by spreading disease.

The most infamous and devastating occurrence of rat-borne disease was the Black Death, a fourteenth century outbreak of bubonic plague that wiped out one-fourth to one-third of Europe's population.

In a world ravaged by war, famine, and disease, the rat population may run wild.

The four seals clearly describe awe-inspiring, frightening judgments without parallel in human history.

There is nothing that has happened since John had this vision that could be the fulfillment of these judgments.

These doomsday prophecies cannot be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70 or any other even since that one.

Nothing this devastating has happened, yet these first four seal judgments are just the beginning of the horrific, worldwide woes that the sinful, rebellious world will experience.

Far worse is still to come in the remainder of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls.

At that time the world of sinners will realize that "*it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God Heb 10:31*"

There will be no escape for impenitent unbelievers from the terrors of the "Tribulation, or from the infinitely worse terrors of hell.

In the words of the writer of Hebrews, "*How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*" Heb 2:3