

Reading Tomorrow's Headlines Today

Four Horsemen and the Coming World Madness – Part II

Revelation 6:1-4

Introduction

Of all the animals on the planet that are interesting to watch, there is none more majestic to me than a horse at full gallop.

For several years, just beyond our back fence, there was a pasture where horses grazed. It was wonderful to be able to watch them. We could hear them in our breakfast room when they took off on a gallop to race one another to the other end of the pasture. All it took was for one of them to start, and in a split second, all of them would take off. The thunder of hoof beats could be heard even when they were out of sight.

The land behind our house is now for sale. In the meantime, the owners are grazing cattle. Watching a cow run does not provide quite the same thrill.

Many of you ride horses and some of you own them. I know of one young lady in our church who competes in barrel racing at rodeos and competitions and is quite successful.

I have a great respect for horses. I personally think they somehow know when I mount them that they do not have to obey. I remember as a kid at camp riding a horse that turned out of the line and galloped all the way back to the barn with me hanging on to the saddle horn.

The last time I rode a horse, a couple of years ago, I was thrown. To be perfectly honest, I fell off, but “thrown” sounds much more heroic. As I cantered along, the horse turned more sharply than I – that was my final ride. Now it is a thrill to be on a riding lawnmower – that is more my speed.

However, I still love to watch a horse kick up its heels. Their strength, beauty, and speed are marvelous to watch. I happen to believe that the sight of a horse in full gallop will get the attention of almost anyone, anywhere in the world.

Without a doubt, the horses ridden by the four horsemen that appear on the scene in Revelation chapter 6 represent the most famous horses of all time. These thundering horses and their riders have captured the imagination of artists, politicians, skeptics, the church at large, and even cult leaders for centuries.

I found it interesting that a young man named Vernon Wayne Howell, known to his followers as David Koresh, was literally obsessed with these four horsemen. He taught often from the book of Revelation, claiming to be Jesus Christ, given the task by God of opening the seven seals and bringing about the end of the world. He and his followers prepared for Armageddon in their compound located in Waco, Texas.

Koresh's world did end, sadly, as he was killed in a standoff with officials. Much of his compound was burned to the ground, tragically taking not only his life, but the lives of most of his followers.

In an ironic way, David Koresh and all who have claimed to be the Messiah before him and since fulfill the warning of Jesus Christ to His disciples in Matthew 24. Christ warned that false messiahs would arise – culminating in the coming of the False Messiah, known as Antichrist.

I watched the news this past week that reported of a man known as Yisrayl Hawkins. Hawkins has built a following of people who now await the beginning

of the final battle. Semi-trucks filled with tons of food and water will allow these followers to survive the war and enter the Kingdom. These people follow because of their faith in Yisrayl Hawkins. In fact, they have all changed their last name to Hawkins, believing it will help insure their entrance into the Kingdom.

I watched Mr. Hawkins tell our nation this week that the final nuclear war will begin on Thursday, June 12, 2008. That is this Thursday. So, if you have a lot of laundry to do, you might want to wait until Friday, since laundry will no longer matter if he is right.

Hawkins is not correct. Any war that might begin on June 12 is not the final war. This is because the book of Revelation clearly teaches that there are several events which will occur, specifically in the Tribulation, before the final battle and the end of the world as we know it. Among these events is the coming of four horsemen, who will first gallop across the earth at the command of heaven.

In Matthew 24, Jesus Christ clearly referred to consecutive events that would take place on the earth before the end of human history as we know it. In fact, when we compare His Mount Olivet Discourse to the seals in Revelation chapter 6, the timeline is clear.

The Tribulation Begins First 3 ½ years	
First Birth Pangs Matthew 24	First Seals: Four Horsemen Revelation 6
False Messiahs (24:5)	White Horse: deception (6:2)
Wars/mass killing (24:6)	Red Horse: war (6:4)
Famine and poverty (24:7a)	Black Horse: famine (6:6)
Widespread death (Matt. 24:7b, Luke 21:11)	Pale Horse: death (Revelation 6:8)

In Matthew’s gospel, the Lord responded to His disciples’ question, “Lord, tell us about the end of the age and when it will come.”

Jewish end times predictions had included for centuries the coming wrath of God, or the Day of the Lord, followed by a Messianic age, which is the age when Israel is restored to their land (Jeremiah 30:1-11).

The disciples had seen the miracles of Christ which demonstrated that He possessed the power

necessary to transform the earth in the future Messianic age.¹

In fact, the Bible refers to Christ’s miracles as, . . . *the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5)*

The prophets had long before associated birth pangs with the trouble on earth preceding the Messianic age. We find this, for example, in Isaiah 13 and Zephaniah 1.

Isaiah speaks of the anguish of humanity as he writes,

. . . *they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. . . . (Isaiah 13:8).*

Further, Isaiah prophecies of a time when,

. . . *the stars . . . and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark . . . and the moon will not shed its light. (Isaiah 13:10)*

He continues in Isaiah 13:11, to say that the world will be punished for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity.

These birth pangs or events have not been fully and literally fulfilled, and will not be until the Tribulation period is underway. In fact, Jesus Christ divided this time of judgment – the Tribulation – into two sections and called the first section, the beginning of birth pangs, and the second section, the Great Tribulation.

Christ clearly spoke of these early birth pangs, which would intensify in horror and terror and trouble, as the first half. He then spoke of even greater and more intense trouble in the second half, which He called the Great Tribulation. The second half climaxes with His return to earth and the establishment of the Messianic age.

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24:30 that at the end of this time of Tribulation, the whole world would see Him coming on the clouds.

By the way, the rapture of the church is not seen by the whole world, but Jesus’ second coming will be.

In the rapture, only the church will be taken up to meet Him in the clouds – taken to the Father’s house (John 14). In His second coming, Christ will come in the clouds, not for His people, but with His people, seen by all the world, and set up His reign upon the earth.

Now, when we compare what Christ told His disciples in Matthew 24 with the opening of the first of the Tribulation seals in Revelation 6, we discover

wonderful similarities – and they are anything but coincidental!

In Matthew 24:5, we are told that the birth pangs begin with worldwide deception. Jesus Christ says,

For many will come in my name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and they will lead many astray.

The absence of the church will evidently open the door to an even greater rise of deceivers, included among them the great deceiver, the Antichrist.

The first horseman in Revelation 6 is the epitome of spiritual deception, seen in the coming Antichrist.

The Lord goes on in Revelation 6 to talk about unparalleled war around the globe – so much so that the rumor on everyone’s lips is talk of yet another.

This also corresponds to the opening of the second seal in Revelation 6, and the coming of the red horse, which represents war and bloodshed.

The Lord moves to the next trauma on earth – the third birth pang – which is seen in the horrors of famine. This birth pang corresponds with the black horse in Revelation 6, known for the onslaught of famine.

Finally, the fourth horseman appears riding a pale horse, which represents worldwide pestilence and death. This corresponds to Christ’s earlier promise, recorded in Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels, referencing untold death by earthquakes and pestilence, or disease.

These are the four birth pangs in Matthew 24 – the coming thunder as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse gallop onto the scene.

Some would say that all of these terrors have already happened; in fact, the lot of mankind is disease, earthquakes, war, and death.

Amillennialists who do not believe in a rapture or the Tribulation period, among other events, say that these wars prophesied by Christ took place as Rome persecuted Christians in the early centuries.

The problem with their view is the simple fact that these horsemen are not riding against Christians; they are judgments – birth pangs – which will plague the entire world, specifically causing humanity to curse God.ⁱⁱ

Understand that Christ did not say these things would not exist before the Tribulation; that there would be no disease or war or death until the Tribulation. He did say that with increasing pain and suffering, like a woman in labor, these events will increase in growing intensity.

The unfolding of these horrors in all their terror and worldwide scope is yet in the future. Even Christ clearly allowed His disciples to understand that the desecration of the temple was yet in the future.

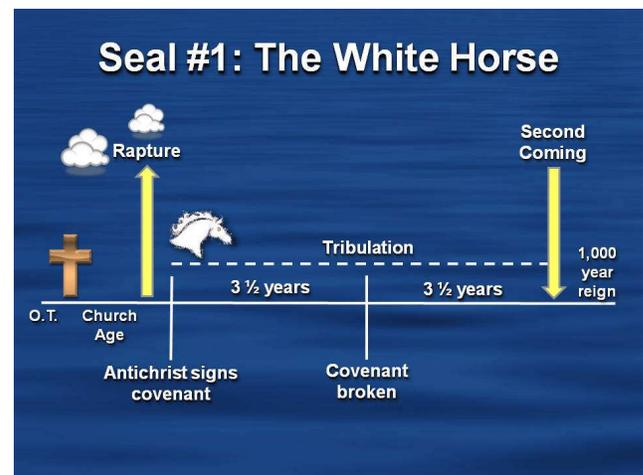
Christ, in fact, clearly said that these first birth pangs (false messiahs, global warfare, growing famine and poverty, and increasing death by natural disasters) would take place before the temple was desecrated by the Antichrist. To this day, the temple has yet to be rebuilt for these troubles to take place and literally be fulfilled. (Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9)

Consider the fact that the apostle John, who had heard Christ deliver the Mount Olivet Discourse recorded in Matthew 24, was the same person seeing the vision of the four horsemen in Revelation 6. He understood the obvious – the same Lord was prophesying the same future events using the same language, prophesying them in the same order, clearly having in mind the same period of Tribulation.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is no wonder that authors have referred to Matthew 24 as the Little Revelation – the Condensed Apocalypse, and the book of Revelation as the Expanded Apocalypse.^{iv}

All right, this is enough of an introduction. Turn to Revelation chapter 6.

The White Horseman



Look at Revelation 6:1-2.

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!”

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.

This is the opening seal – and the thundering of the first horseman to planet Earth on a white horse.

Although John saw a white horse and a mute horseman riding him, this horseman represents the culmination of counterfeit messiahs.

If there were three words to identify the coming of this horseman, these three words would sum up his initial rise to power:

- peace,
- partnership,
- protection.

This horseman does not come to begin war because, according to the events that Daniel prophesied and John sees, the Tribulation begins with a peace accord; a peaceful time.

There is no peace today, although the world would love to have peace. Where? Geographically one place more than any other occupies the thinking and growing frustration of the civilized world – the Middle East.

This rider will come and actually broker peace.

We are reading tomorrow’s headlines today, in this text. The world clamors for peace and suddenly, someone will arrive who can deliver!

It is no wonder that millions will hail him as the Great Leader. Everyone else has failed, but he will succeed.

The world is waiting and watching!

The Shiite branch of Islam believes in the existence of a final Imam – a 12th Imam who will come and usher in peace in the Middle East, if not the whole world.

The President of Iran recently prayed openly at the convening of the United Nations for the speedy appearance of this Imam. Imam, by the way, is the title for a religious leader in Islam.

While Americans cannot pray anywhere publicly in the name of Jesus, at least not out loud, the president of a growing world power unapologetically prays for the coming of his spiritual leader. He opened his speech at the United Nations on September 25, 2007, by praying, “. . . oh, God, hasten the arrival of Imam al-Mahdi and grant him good health and victory and make us his followers . . .”

Can you imagine President George Bush opening his speech at the United Nations by praying, “Oh, God, hasten the arrival of Jesus Christ and make us His followers . . .”?

He would be publicly denounced and would probably have to issue an apology.

There is more to this than an opening prayer, by the way.

Followers of the Shiite Branch of Islam follow men they believe to be the descendants of Mohammed. These Imams are the guardians of the Koran and have the right as spiritual leaders over the world.

These followers believe that in the tenth century, the 12th and last Imam disappeared, actually having been taken by God, hidden away, and kept alive and well – until the end of history to lead an era of Islamic justice and peace.

The current president of Iran is overseeing the building of a mosque that is specifically for the use of this 12th Imam who is supposed to appear from God at any time.

The rider of the white horse will fit the profile of a man of peace – with divine powers and tremendous intellect – claiming divine authority. This rider is capable of brokering a peace that will settle the Jerusalem question, even allowing the temple to be rebuilt. Israel will finally have peace.

This is what leads some to suggest that this rider has to represent the gospel, or Jesus Christ Himself. Only the gospel or the Son of God can pull off this kind of peace and partnership and protection for all the people in the Middle East.

There are similarities in the white horseman and Jesus Christ. In Revelation chapter 19, Christ is seen riding a white horse and He comes to conquer. When He comes, He will certainly bring peace to the world.

However, there are several textual reasons I do not believe this is Christ.

Seal #1: The White Horse	
The Horseman of Revelation 6:2	The Horseman of Revelation 19:11-16
Carries a bow without arrows	Uses his sword and spoken word
Wears a crown (stephanos)	Wears many crowns (diadema)
Brings 3 ½ years of peace	Brings 1,000 years of peace
Called, a “rider”	Called, “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”
Commences the Tribulation	Commences the Millennial Kingdom

1. Their weapons are different.

The horseman of Revelation 6 comes carrying a bow, while Christ comes in Revelation 19 with a sword, smiting His enemies. In fact, the rider of the white horse carries no arrows – just a bow.

This symbolizes the rise of Antichrist in a series of bloodless victories – political victories – as he assumes leadership of the revived Roman Empire. The bow certainly indicates the threat of war, one author wrote, but in this first seal, war is not the result, peace is the result.^v

The Antichrist will deceive the world into believing he is a man of peace – “I’ve got a gun, but look, it’s not even loaded!” – and the world will fall into the devil’s trap.

2. Not only are their weapons different, but their crowns are different as well.

The text reads, in Revelation 6:2b,

... and a crown was given to him . . .

This rider on the white horse in Revelation 6 is wearing a “stephanos (στεφανος)” – a victor’s crown made of leaves, which withers and eventually dries up. In fact, the verb “edothē (εδοθη),” meaning “was given,” is used often in Revelation to speak of divine permission for evil powers to carry out their wicked mission. It is a temporary crown.

Mark this point – this rider is given his temporary position by God. He will ultimately fulfill the purposes of God. He might be riding a white stallion, but his horse is on a leash. The other end of that leash is in the hand of our sovereign Lord.

The crown Christ wears in Revelation 19 is a “diadema,” which is the crown of royalty and of kings.

3. The length of their influence is different.

The rider of the white horse will gallop in and bring three and a half years of peace. What wonderful relief.

However, this is a false peace; it is peace before the coming storm – and the storm will come. At that time though, people will not care; they will not heed the warning signs – they will accept peace at any price.

The appeasement of Adolph Hitler is now chronicled in history. Clearly revealed is the amazing ability of mankind to blind itself to the truth in an effort to have peace – even peace promised to them by the demonically-inspired Hitler.

In a biography of Winston Churchill, I read of Neville Chamberlain’s naïve attempts to keep Hitler from advancing in his global conquest. This Prime Minister traveled to Germany at least on two occasions to placate Hitler and to try to get assurance of peace for Great Britain.

On his second visit, while the western world was holding its breath, Hitler actually signed a pledge promising, in effect, not to harm England. When Chamberlain returned to England, he was a hero. The streets were lined with cheering crowds as he said to his countrymen, “Peace for our time.” Everyone sang his praises, except for one man – Winston Churchill. Churchill said that Hitler was a snake preparing to strike.

Later, when Churchill rose to speak to Parliament, decrying the pledge as nothing more than a sham, he was actually shouted down.

A few years later, Great Britain would be brought to the brink of annihilation by the bombers of Germany. The pledge of peace was an empty promise from a man who never meant to keep it.^{vi}

However, the world desperately wanted peace.

There is no doubt that there will be doubts and wondering about the true character of this horseman. However, blinders will be put on and cheering crowds will hail the man who promises peace to Israel and who seems to be the first man ever who can broker peace in the Middle East.

In a matter of a few years, Israel will see this demonically-empowered man violate his pledge and unleash suffering and death like they have never experienced in any prior holocaust.

This is not Christ; this is a false Christ – the Antichrist.

When Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, rides onto the scene in Revelation chapter 19, He ushers in a thousand years of peace – known as the Millennial reign. This is a kingdom that will then command worldwide victory at the final battle and usher in the new heaven and a new earth.

The first rider promises peace – and it lasts about forty-two months.

The second rider brings peace – and it lasts a thousand years.

4. Another distinct difference between these two riders on white horses is their “titles”.

John observes this mute rider in Revelation 6, who thunders from the sky on a white horse with

nostrils flaring and hooves flashing, and refers to him simply as “a rider”.

In Revelation 19, we read that this white horse rider, who comes thundering onto the world scene, is none other than the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

5. Finally, what they commence in their coming is completely and drastically different.

- The first rider comes to commence the Tribulation.
- The second rider comes to commence the Millennial Kingdom.
- The false messiah rides in as the birth pangs begin – triggering the chaotic time of labor pains and Great Tribulation for seven years.
- The true Messiah rides in as the Tribulation ends, bringing in the Messianic age and a thousand years of majesty upon the throne of David, with His saints overseeing the Kingdom with Him.

The true Prince of Peace, who brings the only permanent peace, has yet to arrive on His white stallion. When He arrives, He will lead the saints with Him to the glory of His Kingdom, which shall usher in amazing conditions on planet Earth that we can hardly imagine. We can only anticipate it – and it is coming.

Warnings from the White Horseman

Before we say farewell to the white horseman, let us draw some needed warnings for today. Observe and learn from the arrival of this skilled deceiver.

1. First, deception works because it models as much of the truth as possible.

This is like the man Yisrayl Hawkins, in the news this week, who had his Bible open, turned to the book of Revelation, announcing the coming of terrible war.

He is right – war is coming, the likes of which we have never seen.

He then said it will be a nuclear war. Maybe – maybe not.

He also said it will start on June 12, 2008 – this coming Thursday. No, it will not – not the war he mentioned in Revelation – because four horses must gallop in first; the Middle East must enjoy security and temporary peace first, and so much more. Unless this starts to happen tomorrow, there is not enough time for the final war to commence on Thursday.

This man is right on one count – war is coming.

He is wrong on assuming the weapons used.

He is also wrong on declaring the date. He said, “June 12th is in the hidden codes.” This brief statement gives us a small clue as to where he is getting his information. It is in the hidden codes. He said, “I expect this nuclear launch to begin on June 12th.”

It is amazing to me is that this man already announced that nuclear war would begin twice before. Why don’t people read the résumés of prophets?

He is also facing a trial in Texas for bigamy – charged with having multiple wives. There are allegations that he has married or has at least been sexually involved with perhaps as many as thirty women among his followers.

From my research on this false teacher, there were hundreds of people in Kenya who believed in his last prophecy that nuclear war would begin September 12, 2006. They sold their land, their pets, and their homes and moved into basement bunkers, armed with gas masks and barrels of grain. The end did not come and they returned home humiliated and their faith in the Bible considered a disgrace.

At this moment, ladies and gentlemen, there are dozens of semi tractor trailers parked on this man’s compound, stocked with food and water, where all his followers await the beginning of the end of the world.

There are seeds of truth, but bushels of deception that lead to distraction, the loss of focus and integrity, and even immorality as blinded people ignore the cover-up of delusion and greed. Even worse, there is a public disgrace on Bible believers everywhere who claim to believe in this Book.

Deception works because it uses biblical terminology; biblical concepts – and pride and immorality and greed can cover up the true motives of those deceiving, and of those deceived.

2. Not only does deception model as much of the truth as it can; secondly, deception has always been a choice weapon of Satan.

Remember, deception was Satan’s first weapon of choice centuries ago in the Garden of Eden.

Maybe you would be the last person on the planet to fall for some guy who says nuclear war is coming. You would never buy supplies from him and hide out with him on his ranch. You are wary of deception like that – you would never cave in to that nonsense.

Maybe for you, it is a different kind of deception that works – a deception just as distracting, if not just as deadly to your testimony and integrity and passion in life.

We are all too prone to this kind of deception because of the willing accomplices of our fallen flesh and wayward minds.

This is one of Satan’s favorites:

- The grass is greener over there . . . no, over there . . . no, no, over there!

This is another popular one, even among church goers:

- God wants you to be happy first and foremost, so do what makes you happy. All that stuff about holiness and discipline – that kind of talk will only hold you down.

Or:

- Believe in yourself – all the answers you need are inside you.

Or:

- Whatever you want, you should have – just speak it; go for it, and do not hang around people who rain on your parade by saying maybe you should not have it.

Or, one more:

- Do not get so hung up on guilt and sin – you are only human. Um, I know I told you earlier that you were divine, but never mind that, when it comes to sin, you are only human! That is it – you are only human.

Deception is so powerful in turning our eyes on others, or on ourselves, and ultimately, away from Christ. This is the reason it is critical to surrender daily to the authority and word and will of God.

Conclusion

Perhaps you are wondering, “Where will I stand in these future days?”

This is not the question to ask. The question to ask is, “Where am I standing today?”

Charles Kettering once wrote, “I am interested in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.”^{vii}

Where are you going to spend the rest of your life? Even more importantly, where are you going to spend eternity?

Do not follow just any white horseman – he may be leading you away from Christ.

It is the word of God that announces this assurance,

These things I have written to you . . . that you may know that you have eternal life . . . (I John 5:13)

Do you know?

How do you know?

John wrote earlier,

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

(I John 5:11-12)

Do not hitch your wagon to the wrong horse!

One white horseman leads to everlasting death. The Son of God – the coming Horseman on His white stallion – leads to everlasting life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/8/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Renald E. Showers, Maranatha: Our Lord Come (Friends of Israel Publishers, 1995), p. 26.

ⁱⁱ Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume I (Moody Press, 1992), p. 425.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kendall H. Easley, Holman New Testament Commentary: Revelation (Holman, 1998), p. 105.

^{iv} Thomas, p. 416.

^v Mark Hitchcock, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Multnomah, 2004), p. 46.

^{vi} William Manchester, The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Alone 1932-1940 (Little, Brown and Company, 1988), p. 360.

^{vii} John F. Walvoord, Armageddon, Oil, and Terror (Tyndale, 2007 ed.), p. 1.