

Death Came Riding

Four Horsemen and the Coming World Madness – Part IV

Revelation 6:5-8

Introduction

On September 30, 1862, Sarah Pardee married a young man by the name of William Winchester. Since William was an only child, he became the sole heir to his father's fortune. His father, Oliver Winchester, was the inventor of the repeating Winchester rifle – the rifle that played a key role in the Civil War and gave the Union army a significant advantage. William Winchester inherited a fortune.

Four years after they married, William and Sarah had a little girl who died after only a few weeks. This threw Sarah into a deep depression. Her grief was compounded when, some years afterward, her husband died of tuberculosis.

Sarah was left with millions of dollars, plus a guaranteed income of a thousand dollars a day. However, the money could not buy happiness or relief from her growing fear of death.

This New England woman – who lived, by the way, in a time of gospel influence – evidently knew nothing of the gospel of Christ, or had chosen to disbelieve it. Instead, she began going to mediums and spiritualists for counsel.

One medium told Sarah that the Winchester family was indeed cursed because of the invention of the rifle, which had been used and was being used to kill thousands of people. The only solution to her grief and the only option for protection and life, she was told, was to move west and build a house for herself and all the spirits of the people who had died from a bullet fired from a Winchester rifle. Sarah was also told that she must never stop building her house. She was promised that as long as she built,

she would live, but that if she ever stopped building, she would die.

Sarah Winchester believed this. She moved to San Jose, California, where she purchased a six room farmhouse from a doctor. She began to build and build and build. For the next thirty-eight years, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, something was either being constructed in the house or attached to it.

She spent her inheritance of nearly twenty million dollars furnishing all the elaborate rooms for her spirit guests. Railway cars brought in supplies.

Every morning Sarah met with her foreman to sketch out some new room or addition. Rooms were added to rooms, and towers and peaks were built. Because she was building for spirits and because she must never stop building, staircases led to nowhere, doors opened into walls, and hallways doubled back upon themselves.

Sarah was fascinated by the superstition of the number 13. As a result, the house had windows with 13 panes of glass and there were 13 bathrooms. When she died, she even left her will composed in 13 sections which she had signed 13 times.

In spite of the promises of mediums and spiritualists; in spite of faith in a family curse; in spite of her fortune, on September 5, 1922, at the age of 83, Sarah Winchester died. The building finally stopped. Her home is now a museum for the curious, located on Winchester Boulevard in San Jose.¹

The truth is – there is a family curse, and it is fatal. It is the curse of sin. In fact, the human race, as Christ said in John 3:18, is,

... condemned already ...

John the Baptizer adds the ominous warning to his sermon in John 3:36,

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever [disbelieves] in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

The wrath of God is already upon the unbeliever, to be fully unleashed in the final and everlasting judgment of hell.

Prior to this individual application of God's wrath, there will be a demonstration of wrath on earth during the time of the Tribulation.

This is the wrath of the Lamb. As it begins to be unleashed upon humanity, four horsemen will come thundering from the presence of God.

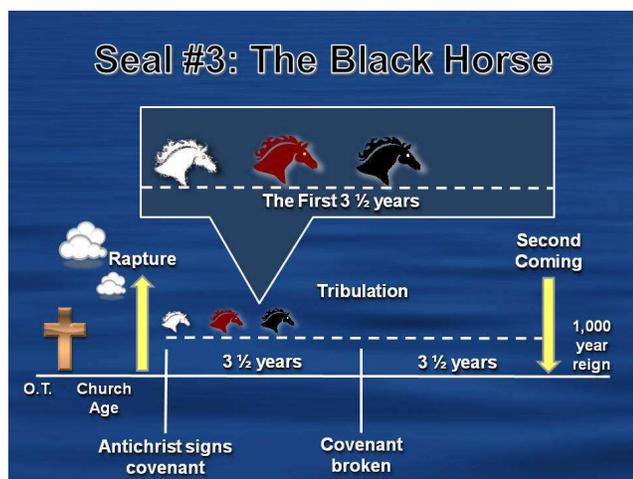
There is no medium or spiritualist who can provide some way of escape. There is no superstition that can stave off disaster upon disaster upon disaster in this coming world madness.

In Revelation chapter 6, verse 1, the first horseman comes riding on a white horse. He is a counterfeit prince of peace who offers a brief time of peace, primarily affecting Israel.

In Revelation 6:3, the second horseman then comes riding upon a blood red horse to incite global unrest and murder. It is as if a blackout hits the planet and rioting, looting, killing, and wars break out all over the Earth.

If this is not bad enough, the Lamb opens the scroll just a little further as another rider mounts up.

The Black Horse



Notice Revelation 6:5.

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.

This rider is holding a "zugos (ζυγος)," which was a metal bar with scales at both ends.¹¹

There is no reason to wonder what these scales symbolize, for we are told in the middle part of Revelation 6:6,

. . . A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius . . .

One quart of wheat in the first century represented the daily need for one person to survive. The denarius was a Roman silver coin equivalent to one day's full wages. In other words, enough wheat to feed one man for only one day cost a full day's wages.

Let me put these food prices into today's economy. Suppose you worked at McDonald's – which might make you feel like you are already in the Tribulation, but you are not – and you worked tomorrow for eight hours and were paid the minimum wage. Right now the minimum wage in our state is \$6.15 per hour. The good news is that next summer the minimum wage is going to increase by more than a dollar an hour to \$7.25.

Before you get excited, imagine that this biblical scene was unfolding. You would need every bit of Monday's income of around fifty dollars to buy one loaf of bread. Fifty dollars for one loaf of bread! You would also not be able to eat at McDonald's because by comparison, a Big Mac would cost a hundred dollars.

You gather the family around your paycheck and decide that more than one person needs to eat today. Since you cannot afford one loaf of wheat bread anymore, you will eat barley.

John records in Revelation 6:6 that a person can get about three times more barley than wheat for one day's wage. This means that a man will be able to feed his family – that is, if he has a job and gets paid – one day at a time.

By the way, coarse barley bread was the food of animals and poverty-stricken people.

This is runaway inflation!

Following the outbreak of universal war and rioting, it is no surprise that Earth is plunged into worldwide famine.

It is interesting to note the little phrase at the end of Revelation 6:6 that indicates that oil and wine would not be harmed.

Olive oil and wine were the luxuries of the rich, but the staples of life affecting the majority middle class were being weighed out a pinch at a time.ⁱⁱⁱ

This informs us that the disparity between the rich and the rest of the world will become more and more apparent. Comfort is denied the common worker, but the rich pass through the trial virtually unscathed.^{iv}

This kind of disparity is happening in many places around the world, but when this seal is broken and the black horse thunders forward, nearly all of humanity will writhe with hunger.

I researched briefly the Great Famine of 1315 which affected much of Europe. Stores of grain and luxuries were limited to nobles and royalty. They feasted while most starved.

Children were abandoned in this famine. In fact, this became the backdrop for a German tale of two children abandoned by their father in the woods, only to be captured by a witch who planned to cannibalize them. The children outwitted her and stuffed her into the oven instead. They took her jewels and money and found their way back to their father. With money now for food to survive the famine, this father and his children, Hansel and Gretel, lived happily ever after.^v

There is no happy ending with the coming of the black horseman. The world is on the verge of bankruptcy. World economies are shifting and uncertain. Our current gasoline prices, flooding in the Midwest, and an Asian tsunami are mild and distant thunderclaps of a coming storm.

Frankly, the coming black horse of famine is something we, in this culture, have great difficulty understanding. It brings no horror to our minds and hearts because most of us have never been hungry.

My idea of going without is skipping a snack before bedtime. Am I going to eat that bowl of ice cream? No! What great denial. What resolve.

You may remember as a child sitting at the table resisting the squash or the green peas. You were told to eat your vegetables because of all the starving people, right? It did not help to be told that, did it? And it really did not help when you talked back to your parents and said that starving people would not eat that stuff either!

Well, there was truth to what your parents told you. There are starving people in the world. In fact, during the time it takes to eat lunch today, four hundred people will starve to death on planet Earth.

The truth is that you and I mirror the rich and the royalty in current world economies. I have read that

the average American dog has a higher protein diet than much of the world's population.^{vi}

One of the great challenges in addressing the poverty of our world is corrupt political systems combined with the sinful greed of human hearts. Much of the food we send to starving countries never makes it into the mouths of the poor.

We saw this only recently in our humanitarian efforts in China. Corrupt officials took supplies, and instead of giving them to the needy, sold them on the black market.

This is one of the reasons the relief efforts by our church to China right now are through Christian partners who not only deliver food to those who are needy, but the gospel as well. We understand that people who are full will die one day just like people who are hungry.

The mission of the church is not to combat world hunger, but spiritual hunger. If we can feed or help people physically, and then use that as a bridge to feed them spiritually, we may help them not only temporarily but eternally.

In fact, giving food to someone today who may actually face the horror, deprivation, and famine in the Tribulation is little comfort.

There is a coming world famine that will make all others seem insignificant. It will be one of the causes of over one billion people dying in a matter of months.

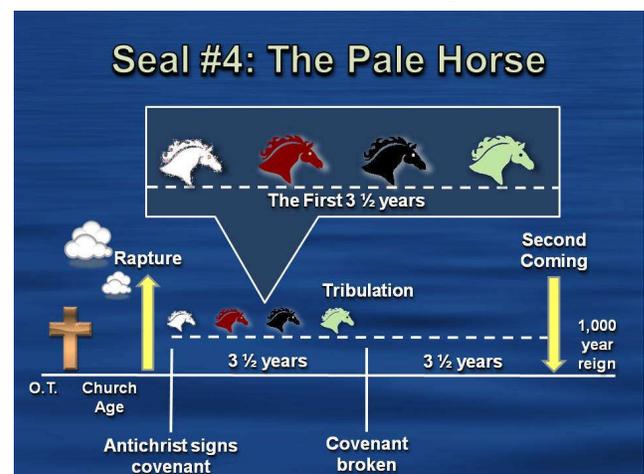
However, the situation only gets worse.

The Pale Horse

Notice Revelation 6:7-8a.

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"

And I looked, and behold, a pale horse!...



By the way, the Greek word for “pale” is “chloros (χλωρος),” from which our English word “chlorine” is derived. It is a word that referred to a “pale green color”. It is used in Revelation 8:7 for vegetation.

This word was used by the ancients to refer to the decay of death. In the fifth century BC, Thucydides, the Greek historian, used the word for the appearance of people dying in a plague.^{vii}

Without a doubt, the color would be sickly and unnatural for a horse.

The interesting fact about this fourth and final horse is that its rider is the only one named. Notice further in Revelation 6:8,

. . . And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth . . .

As bad as the situation has been; as horrific and devastating as it has been, here comes Death riding a pale green horse. In the wake of this horseman, one-fourth of the world's population will die.

There has never been a time in world history when the results of all four horsemen occurred in overlapping sequence; there has never been a time when world madness with all the effects of these horsemen has been felt universally. Certainly one-fourth of the world's population has not been killed in such a short amount of time – nor has this been calculated at any time in history.

If the Tribulation were to begin in the next few years, it would mean that more than one billion people would die in a matter of months.

Death comes riding in to mop up a quarter of the world's population.

How does God destroy so many people at one time?

We are told of four causes of death in the next phrase of Revelation 6:8.

. . . [Death will] kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

1. The first cause of death is the sword.

I believe, along with many others, that this is a reference primarily to death by murder. This is the deadly assault of individuals against others; corrupt regimes creating their own killing fields. In the chaos of everything else that is happening, people will take the law into their own hands. Certainly wars that began earlier will restart and new wars will begin.^{viii}

2. The second cause of death is famine.

This is the culmination of lingering starvation as those who have somehow hung on by foraging for their existence finally run out of options and starve to death.

3. The third cause of death is pestilence.

This Greek word is the normal word translated “death”. However, Ezekiel used the word to refer to

. . . plague to cut off man and beast (Ezekiel 14:21)

Can you imagine the effects of worldwide hunger and bloodshed, as well as the loss of civility and respect for human life? It is the survival of the fittest, fastest, strongest, and meanest. Imagine death, disease, and corpses everywhere. Epidemics will spread like wildfire.

Even in our modern world of medicine, when the confidence of the 1970s seemed to spell the end of sweeping killer microbes, a strange new disease appeared in the early 1980s – AIDS. In the last three years alone, global casualties from this disease outnumbered the population of our state. Eight thousand people die of AIDS every single day.

According to one Newsweek article, thirty new diseases have cropped up since the mid-1970s, causing the deaths of millions of people. These include Ebola, mad cow disease, avian flu, Lyme disease, West Nile virus, SARS, and so on.

The Institute of Medicine says, and I quote, “Infectious disease will continue to emerge.”

In addition to this, throw in the biological weapons that will be unleashed during the wars of the red horseman and afterward. Weapons containing smallpox, anthrax, and Ebola have already been prepared. Hundreds of millions of people could easily be wiped out in a very short time.^{ix}

Pestilence or plagues, John writes, will contribute to wiping out one of every four people alive during what Jesus Christ and John consider to be the beginning of birth pangs – the opening days of the Tribulation.

Those who believe that the rapture will occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation, because this is when the wrath of God is really felt, have not studied these four horsemen and the coming world madness closely enough.

This is horrific – one out of four people dead. No superstition can save them; they cannot build a house and cheat death; the spirits will not protect any of them.

There is one more cause of death.

4. The fourth cause of death is wild beasts of the earth.

This could certainly be interpreted as a reference to carnivorous animals loose and on the prowl during these conditions. Some believe this could be lions and tigers and bears on the rampage.

My primary objection with this interpretation is that carnivorous beasts will have all they want to eat among the starving and dying already, worldwide.

These beasts are not seen as eating those who are dying, but killing those who are living. One-fourth of the Earth's population will be cut down – and wild animals will play a role in this.

Some believe this is a reference to the antichrist, given the fact that this word for “beast,” or “(θηριον),” is used throughout Revelation to refer to the coming of the antichrist or his false prophet.

I would not interpret it this way either simply because at this point in the Tribulation, the antichrist is not killing people. He is still gaining world power and respect by his peacekeeping mission throughout the first half of the Tribulation.

I believe these wild beasts are connected to the preceding cause of death – plagues.

The most dangerous wild animal on the planet, by far more dangerous and destructive to man than the lion, tiger, or bear, is the common rat.^x

The rat carries at least thirty-five known diseases. Their fleas carry bubonic plague, and history verifies the impact they had in Europe six hundred years ago when the bubonic plague swept millions to their death. They also carry typhus, which has killed an estimated two hundred million people over the last four centuries.^{xi}

This may well be what John has in mind.

Sword, famine, pestilence, plagues and diseases kill one-fourth of the world population.

Now, look closely at Revelation 6:8 and notice that this pale horse has someone following him. John writes,

. . . And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him.

Wherever Death rides, Hades follows like a shadow.

This is God's way of warning humanity and all who still refuse to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, that death is not the end of suffering. Death is not an escape!

Death may take the body, but Hades takes the soul.^{xii}

Hades – Old Testament Sheol – is today the place where the soul of the unbeliever goes after death. It is a place of consciousness and self-awareness; a place of physical suffering where an intermediate body longs for a drop of water. Christ described the man suffering in Hades who cried out,

*. . . “I am in anguish in this flame.”
(Luke 16:24)*

According to Revelation 20:14, Hades will be eventually emptied into the lake of fire – which is eternal hell.

Hades then comes, and rightly so, behind death, as it were, to take the souls of all who die in this Tribulation. These souls, along with all the unbelieving in all of human history, are awaiting – tormented, condemned, without appeal – their final judgment and delivery to eternal hell.

You might say, “This is why I don't like coming to church – every time I come you talk about hellfire and brimstone.”

I do not preach on this every Sunday. Perhaps it is God's timing for whenever you show up!

Dear friend, do you think for a moment that eternal hell is something we have invented to scare people into being good or going to church or giving some money to charity? Do you think I enjoy preaching about eternal torment?

No, I preach it because it is true. This is for real.

This is the gospel. There is a real eternal hell to shun and there is a real eternal glorious new heaven and new earth to gain.

The turnstile that determines which way you spend all of eternity is in the form of a cross and the One upon it who paid for your sins, and, in fact, the sins of the whole world. Again, the words of the prophet John the Baptizer sound both a promise and a warning,

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever [disbelieves] in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
(John 3:36)*

The thundering of the four horsemen and the coming world madness with all its terrors, as the wrath of God is unleashed on the planet, is still nothing compared to having the wrath of God remain on you forever.

Perhaps you have been brought to hear one more fire and brimstone warning. Our prayer is that this

time, you will hear, and believe in, and find safety in Christ.

Conclusion

These four horsemen have made me think of four words:

- **Motivation** – the potential of the church age ending in our lifetime causes me to want to communicate the gospel of Christ with every means possible to our generation.
- **Evaluation** – the end of days as we know them causes me to want to not only communicate the gospel, but confirm the sincerity of my faith in Christ alone. Is your testimony a card signed at camp, a baptism experience at the age of twelve, or is it a relationship with the living Lord?
- **Anticipation** – clinging to the promise of Christ’s coming, and to love and long for His appearing (II Timothy 4:8); knowing that before these horsemen thunder *from* the skies, if we are still alive, we will be taken *to* the skies to meet our Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:17).
- **Exaltation** – the soon coming of Christ, the glory of His victory, the majesty of His kingdom, and the power of His new creation causes me to want to honor and exalt Christ our Redeemer and our coming King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The four horsemen and the coming world madness are horrific scenes of death and despair. Frankly, every member of the human race was born in a funeral procession.

However, through faith in Jesus Christ, we have left the funeral procession and joined a wedding

party. The wedding processional could begin at any moment with the wedding march played on some angelic trumpet.

We are headed for the rapture – or the resurrection – most certainly a reunion.

Already in recent weeks, our church family has seen several go on from our midst – Donald Cooper a couple of weeks ago, Ted Appleman eight or nine days ago, and Ellie Glaiser just yesterday. Should the rapture occur today, they will form the welcoming committee home!

What are we to do until this reunion and the wedding reception as we, the bride of Christ, await our Beloved?

The answer is motivation, evaluation, anticipation, and exaltation.

Thomas Watson, a Puritan theologian and church leader, said, “The world is but a great inn, where we are to lodge a night or two, and be gone; what madness is it to set our heart upon this inn, and forget our home.”

And what madness it is indeed to cling to Earth. For what madness is coming to planet Earth with the thundering, galloping hoof beats of the four horsemen.

We will leave the madness behind, and like the Thessalonians in chapter 1 of Paul’s first letter addressing them, we will

*... serve the living and true God,
and . . . wait for His Son from heaven,
whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who
delivers us from the wrath to come.*

(I Thessalonians 1:9b-10)

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/22/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wirt_Winchester.

ⁱⁱ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 826.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 101.

^{iv} Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1992), p. 433.

^v http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Famine_of_1315-1317.

^{vi} Phillips, p. 101.

^{vii} Stewart Custer, Revelation: From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 78.

^{viii} Sam Gordon, Revelation: Worthy is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 158.

^{ix} Mark Hitchcock, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Multnomah, 2004), p. 88.

^x Phillips, p. 105.

^{xi} Gordon, p. 159.

^{xii} Ray C. Stedman, Revelation: God's Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 146.