

Revelation 6:1-8 “Sign of the Times: The Four Horsemen of Revelation”

Intro. This evening I began a brief series of messages entitled, “Signs of the Times in the Book of Revelation.” I have gone through the book of Revelation looking for prophesied events that signal the soon return of Christ. In this series I will share some of the key signs that I found in the book of Revelation, especially the ones that are very relevant to the present time.

You may recall that in Matthew 24 we read that the disciples asked Jesus in v.3, “...what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” If you compare Matthew 24 with the book of Revelation you will find that many of the signs mentioned in the Olivet discourse are repeated in the book of Revelation.

We have been given the prophetic signs of the return of the Lord in order that we may obey the command given by Jesus in Mt. 25:13, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” So we must learn the signs of the Lord’s return in order that we may watch. There will be a generation of believers who will experience the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Luke 21:28, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” Folks, based on what I will share with you tonight, I believe we are getting very close to the return of Christ. The prophetic signs of Revelation 6 are casting their shadows to the present.

So beginning in chapter 6 of Revelation, we will see what will take place on this earth when it is time for Christ to reclaim this earth to Himself. This period is God’s final countdown for mankind, culminating in the personal, visible return of Jesus Christ to this earth to reclaim it as His own possession. You see, in v.1 the Lamb of God, Jesus, begins opening the seals of the scroll. I believe the scroll represents the title deed of the earth. This earth does not belong to man; it does not really belong to the devil (cf. Mt. 4:8-9). It belongs to Christ as both Creator and Redeemer. The scroll also contains the destiny of mankind. And so as each of the 7 seals of the scroll is opened, we are given a little more information concerning what is to happen in the future just before Jesus returns to this earth. So these are important prophetic signs. If the conditions described here could be fulfilled within the next few years, then we may indeed be getting close to the return of Christ.

We know from Daniel 9 that there will be a significant prophetic time period of 7 years right before Jesus returns to claim this earth for Himself. This 7-year period will be divided into two 3 ½ year sections. This is confirmed in Revelation by the frequent references to 42 months. So the first 3 ½ years seems to be a time of relative peace, and a time when the antichrist will work to unite the world under his control and his false prophet will unite false religion. There is a connection since religion has been a source of conflict for many years. I see us moving in that direction. In fact, the Abrahamic Family House, which includes a synagogue, a Catholic church and a mosque, is set to open in 2022 in the capitol of the United Arab Emirates. You can read about it on the Vatican’s web site. Then, in the last 3 ½ years peace will end, and great tribulation will begin. Jesus said in Matthew 24:21, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

And so tonight we will look into the future and see what will happen on earth during the first years of the 7-year tribulation period. Much of what we find in the first 4 seals coincides with Matt. 24:3-7. Jesus says that these events will only be the beginning of sorrows. That is actually a reference to birth pains, which become more frequent and intense, signaling that a birth is soon to

take place. So what takes place in the first 3 1/2 years will be somewhat mild compared to what takes place toward the end of the Great Tribulation, when conditions will get even worse. Yet these early signs are important.

Now as you know, Revelation is a book that is full of symbolism. We find such symbolism in chapter 6. As each seal is opened, John describes in picturesque imagery an event that seems to leap to life right out of the midst of the scroll itself. Here we will see the symbolism of horsemen. Don't look for a literal fulfillment. Instead, Rev. 6 uses symbolism to describe prophetic truth. The people in ancient times were very impressed with the power and swiftness of horses. So the horses signify swift and irresistible power. Even so, the events described here will come upon the earth swiftly, perhaps unexpectedly, and certainly inevitably. We have witnessed rapid changes to our country and world in just the last 18 months. Even so, prophetic events can come to pass rapidly, and unexpectedly, especially to those who do not know Bible prophecy. So let's see what is going to take place in that great culminating period of earth's history. Now as we study these verses, I believe that you will see that we could easily be very close to these things coming to pass. Instead of naming the signs of the times in my outline, I will follow John's symbolic presentation of these signs. First of all, we see:

I. THE WHITE HORSE AND RIDER

Verse 2 says, "And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." Now the fact that this rider rides upon a white horse causes some to suppose that this could be a good person, perhaps even the Messiah. And so it will seem to non-Christians who are religious, including many Jews (John 5:43). Yet white is not necessarily a symbol of moral purity. It was common for *conquering* emperors and generals to ride on a white horse. This is confirmed by the last of v.2 which describes the rider on the white horse as going forth "conquering, and to conquer." The NIV text has translated it, "bent on conquest." Such men were typically *not* good men. Also, in the Olivet discourse, Jesus mentions those who would come and falsely claim to be the Messiah or Savior of man (Mt. 24:5). The Roman emperors wanted to be called, "The savior of the world." How deceitfully arrogant! As we shall see, the person who conquers is anything but morally pure. Also, since he was given a victor's crown (*stephanos*), that indicates victorious conquests over more and more kingdoms and nations. (Jesus wears a diadem crown). So this refers to some leader to come who will conquer, or take political control, of more and more nations. So the ascendancy of the antichrist is one of the key early signs of the very last days. Also, Paul said in 2 Thess. 2:3 that "that Day will not come unless ... the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition." For us today, we are not yet looking for the antichrist, but the conditions that could lead to the rise of the antichrist.

Now as we think about the rise of the antichrist, notice:

A. The Means of Such Conquest - V.4 implies that he will bring peace for a time. Notice that the rider has a bow, but nothing is said about arrows. That could indicate that he expands his rule over more and more nations without resorting to war. Many nations will buy into the political movement and promises of the antichrist. Again, the fact that he rides upon a horse implies rapid conquest.

Do you remember the fall of the Soviet Empire? It happened peacefully for the most part as large crowds marched for liberty and independence. They gained their independence without resorting to war.

So the beginning of the tribulation is a time when the antichrist will succeed in bringing peace to a troubled world, probably through skillful diplomacy, political pressure and various

promises, including a peace covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27a). There are very few wars taking place at the present time other than border skirmishes, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and their Muslim and Arab neighbors. What we have today are mainly bloody conflicts by terrorists and drug lords. But full-scale war could break out at any moment. North Korea and Iran are threatening the world with nuclear weapons. China may attack Taiwan. Don't forget Russia, which has a great army. I believe it is likely that war will break out among many nations right before the rise of antichrist. So there will be a longing for peace on the part of many. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 says, "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape." But it will be like the Roman peace, which was peace through strength, and at best was merely an absence of serious war.

B. The Identity of the Horseman – As we compare this Scripture with other prophecies, it seems most likely to me that the rider of the white horse is none other than the "prince that shall come" of Daniel 9:26, the antichrist, who is to head up the revived Roman Empire and ultimately become the world ruler. More detail of this ruler will be given in chapter 13.

Application: I see the conditions ripening for the rise of such a leader identified in v.2. The world is facing great problems, both perceived and real. The world will become desperate for a leader who seems to be able to solve our problems. Just the last 18 months we have been conditioned to accept authoritarian rule as the only means to save us from problems like the pandemic. Just look at Australia! Political leaders are trying to use climate change as an excuse to control economic activity from the top down. The appearance of the antichrist, as prophesied in v.2 and elsewhere, could be closer than you think.

The next sign is:

II. THE RED HORSE AND RIDER

We read in vv.3-4, "When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come and see.' 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." Many have hopes that a "new world order" of humanistic, scientific, and political advancement will bring lasting peace to this world. As a result, multitudes will place their hope in the rider of the white horse, who will promise peace. But such people will discover that they have made a foolish mistake placing their faith in the antichrist. All efforts to bring peace apart from Jesus Christ will fail. So notice what we see here:

A. The Temporary Peace Will End – In v.4 we see that the color of the horse is fiery red (*purrhos*, from *pur* = red), which is suggestive of war and bloodshed. It seems to suggest that just about every nation will no longer be at peace. Do you think that mankind can have lasting peace without the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ? No. After all, only Christ deals with the root cause of conflict. The peace brought about by the antichrist will *not* last.

B. Widespread War Will Begin - The second seal anticipates resistance to the intentions of the rider on the white horse. Ever since Cain murdered Abel, man has been escalating war upon this earth. All of the great wars of the past have just been rehearsals for the Great War to come. This is confirmed by the words of Jesus in Mt. 24:6, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." It may be significant that the word for "sword" (*machaira*) in the last of v.4 refers to the short sword of man-to-man conflict, rather than the large battle sword. The Zealots among the Jews would use this type of sword against the Romans because it was more easily concealed. By the way, the

Zealots viewed themselves as patriots, while the Romans would have viewed them as terrorists. So the word “great” does not refer to the size of the sword, but to the greatness of the conflict and fighting that is to come. This suggests to me that there will be wide-spread internal strife, rebellion, terrorism, and civil war, rather than traditional battles between armies of nations. We see this in Afghanistan and other Middle Eastern countries. We also see drug lords engaging in this kind of fighting in Mexico, and in cities like Chicago. In fact, several prophecies describe the last days as a time of much lawlessness. Jesus said in Mt. 24:12, “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” 2 Thess. 2:6ff refers to the removal of the restraint that is hindering wide-spread lawlessness. The anti-police movement is already contributing to increased lawlessness. By the way, terrorists and gang members do not pay any attention to local or international laws.

I can see this prophecy coming to pass almost at any time, can't you?

Now it is not surprising that the red war horse is followed by:

III. THE BLACK HORSE AND RIDER

We read in vv.5-6, “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. 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.’” Generally, this describes a time of economic disaster. Now specifically, let's see what the black horse represents. First of all:

A. World Famine Will Begin - The balance in the rider's hand represents scarcity. Jesus taught in Mt. 24:7 that there would be famine.

1. Reasons - Scarcity of food is a common result of warfare and violent conflict. Too many farm workers will be diverted to war. Beating plowshares into swords produces no food. Many fields will be impacted by war. Today we are looking at another cause of food shortages, and that is supply chain problems. According to the *Epoch Times* (9/29/21), several industry groups have warned world leaders of a worldwide supply-chain “system collapse” due to pandemic restrictions, which also contribute to a worker shortage. We have hundreds of ships waiting for weeks to be unloaded. We don't have enough truck drivers. One reason is the U.S. government is enabling people *not* to work. Terrorists could even target the supply chains to make things even worse. Also, corrupt governments divert food or let food go to waste.

2. Basic Food Stuffs Will Be Affected – The last of v.6 says, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius....” Even now there is a widespread problem of lack of food. North Korea has a major food shortage, with over half the population not getting enough to eat. Half of the children of the world of preschool age are undernourished. Malnutrition claims 10,000 lives every day. Again, the pandemic is making things worse.

Interestingly, we also see that:

3. Some Products Will Not Be Affected – At the end of v.6 we read, “and do not harm the oil and the wine.” Products of the vine and tree such as wine and olive oil would be less affected by the diversion of the population from farming to war. Grain crops need workers each year to plow, plant, and cultivate. But olive trees and vines, when once established, will grow and produce year after year without as much attention. Also, since the roots of the olive and vine go deeper, they could not be affected by a limited drought, which would all but destroy the grain. So the most simple interpretation of this reference is to simply see it as a natural and expected limitation to the famine. Some commentators also believe that vineyards and olive orchards tended to belong to wealthier people. Accordingly, the passage suggests that the lifestyles of the wealthier

inhabitants of the earth are less affected by the early judgments of the tribulation. I could also point out that, even in the most difficult times, men will make a way to make, distribute, and sell wine, which keeps well in storage for many years!

B. Government Will Control What Food Is Left – In the last of v.5 the vision of balances could indicate this.

C. There Will Be Hyperinflation – We see an indication of this in v.6, where it says, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius...” Now let’s understand the terms here. A *denarius* was a silver coin, and it was the daily wage of a common laborer. And in ordinary times, a *denarius* would purchase 12 to 15 times as much food as mentioned here in v.6. So in days to come, famine and inflation will play such havoc with the economies of the world that a working man’s daily wage will buy only enough of the poorest food to satisfy his own immediate needs. A quart of wheat was the average daily consumption of a man in those days. So the average man will have to pay out his entire day’s salary just to purchase food for his family, leaving nothing for anything else.

I do believe the stage is being set for such hyperinflation described here. As governments have moved toward socialism, they have gone into excessive debt, including the world’s economic superpower. Here in the U.S. the national debt is now 28.8 trillion (see USDebtClock.org) and the so-called progressives want to add trillions more to the national debt. That’s over \$86,000 for each person, or over \$344,000 for a family of four. That also well surpasses the Gross Domestic Product of the U.S. (22.9 trillion). That is unsustainable! That doesn’t even include our excessive obligations for Medicare and Social Security. At the rate we are going and unless we make significant changes, the debt bubble will probably burst within a few years, causing hyperinflation. We are already seeing inflation heat up, the most in 30 years. So as man has put their faith in government instead of God to meet their needs, the day is coming when government solutions will become a total failure, and cause more harm than good.

Well, this will lead to the fourth horseman who rides:

IV. THE PALE HORSE AND RIDER

Look at vv.7-8, “When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’ 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.” When the 4th seal is opened, a horse as pale as death appears. The word “pale” should be understood as yellowish-green. The rider was named Death, like the Grim Reaper. He will claim the physical lives of many people. And notice that Hades followed closely behind. Contrary to the wishful thinking of some, physical death is not the end of each person. There *is* an afterlife, in heaven or in hell. Death parades on his horse and the realm of the departed follows like a street sweeper behind him, cleaning up the debris of the fallen and imprisoning them in that shadowy world (Patterson).

Now the text tells us a few things about this coming death. First of all, we see:

A. The Magnitude of Death – The last of v.8 says, “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.” This *could* mean that ¼ of the *nations* of the earth will experience wide-spread death. It is more likely that ¼ of the world’s population will die. At today’s population of 7.75 billion, that would be just under 2 billion people! This would represent the greatest destruction of human life ever recorded in history since the flood. War and famine are not new to mankind, but the magnitude of the loss of life

described here will be something new. No wonder this time period is called by Jesus the “the Great Tribulation” (Mt. 24:21).

B. The Means of Death – Notice in the last of v.8 the various ways people will die. This explains how such widespread death is possible. First, there will be:

1. War – Don’t think for a minute that world war is a thing of the past. It is interesting that the word translated “sword” here is a different Greek word. It (*rhomphaia*) refers to the large battle sword. Today’s armies have the means to reduce population figures by tens of millions within hours, especially if major population centers are attacked. The peace of the antichrist will not last. Economic conditions are going to be so bad that many nations will go to war.

2. Famine – The word translated “hunger” (*limos*) refers to scarcity of food. We have already discussed this in v.6. As a result, many will die from a lack of food.

3. Disease – It may seem strange to say that many will die due to “death.” But I believe that it refers here to something that *brings* widespread death. What could John be referring to? One wonders what could also contribute to the deaths of almost 2 billion people within a short time? As we see here, it is a combination of things. But one possibility is this is a reference to some kind of pestilence. Jesus predicted that there would be pestilence in the last days in Luke 21:11. Have you heard of the “Black Death” that killed so many in Europe in the Middle Ages? Besides, sickness is much worse during and shortly after times of war. From January 1918 to December 1920, the flu pandemic killed approximately 50 million people worldwide, or about 2.3% of the population. That pandemic followed on the heels of WWI.

This could even refer to bacteriological or chemical warfare. For a fraction of the cost of a single atomic bomb, it can wipe out multitudes! Due to the overuse of antibiotics, drug-resistant bacteria have already appeared. This could become a weapon of choice among terrorists. And the Chinese Communist Party did little to prevent the spread of the coronavirus from their country in 2019 into the first part of 2020. And many governments, led by the U.S., are relying mainly on vaccines to combat the coronavirus, and yet they are proving to offer only short-term immunity and may be contributing to the rise of variants, which the vaccines are less capable of providing protection for, unlike natural immunity after exposure, which is much more robust in providing protection against variants (Israeli study). How else do you explain the fact that so many have been fully vaccinated, and yet we had more covid deaths in the first 9 months of 2021 than all of 2020?¹ Let me give you one more fact to think about. About 80% of our medicines come from China and India.² What would happen if those supplies were to be cut off? Such factors can explain the widespread death from disease that we read in this prophecy.

4. Beast of the Earth - The Greek word refers primarily to wild animals. We have been hearing more and more stories of bears, sharks, pythons, alligators, and other animals killing people, including poisonous snakes. This situation will only escalate in the last days. After all, a number of such animals are losing their natural habitat to humans, and closer contact with humans will happen more frequently. Perhaps as the famine becomes severe, many will turn their dogs loose and they will run in packs and even attack people to satisfy their hunger, especially the young!

However, the word (*therion*) can refer to “little beasts.” The most destructive creature on earth, so far as mankind is concerned, is not the lion or the bear, but the rat. The rat is clever, adaptable, and destructive. Rats carry as many as 35 different diseases. Their fleas carry bubonic plague, which killed a third of the population of Europe in the 14th century. And rats menace

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marisadellatto/2021/10/06/us-covid-19-deaths-for-2021-surpass-toll-from-2020/>.

² <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/coronavirus-disrupt-us-drug-supply-shortages-fda>

human food supplies, which they both devour and contaminate.³

Conclusion: What an awful picture of where our world is heading! So I want to conclude with some words of hope. First, many evangelical Bible scholars and teachers believe that the rapture of believers spoken of in 1 Thess. 4:16-17 will take place before the tribulation that I have been speaking of. If that is the case, then we will not face the severe conditions described here. However, even if that interpretation turns out to be incorrect, you can be sure that God will care for and comfort His people. Jesus explicitly stated in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Furthermore, remember the picture described in v.8 of the pale horse, and he who sat on it was called Death, and Hades followed with him? Well I have some good news. Jesus said in Rev. 1:18, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” This prophecy predicts that widespread death is coming to this world. But believers have no need to fear. Jesus has even conquered death. He has “the keys of Hades and of Death.” We do not fear death, for Christ has removed the fear of death. We know our sins are forgiven, and we are going to heaven. But there are countless millions of people who are not ready to face death. Are you? If not, trust Jesus tonight! And for those of us who are saved, let’s win souls while there is still time and opportunity.

Sources: W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962-1966); Jack Van Impe, *Revelation Revealed* (Windsor, Ontario: Van Impe Ministries, 1982); George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972); Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973); Page Patterson, *The New American Commentary: Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2012); John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1974); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Jacob B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961); John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1966). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker, or go to www.SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com/Resources. Dr. Felker’s email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).

³ In the book of Revelation the term primarily refers to beastly men.