

Rev. 6:1-17 “Four Horsemen”

For the Children: In Bible-times, horsemen were part of the various armies that terrified the world. John is giving us a picture of how God uses war and other disasters to punish a world that has turned from Him. He controls all of history, even the things that do so much harm, to train His people as well as to punish His enemies. Even when His children are killed by war or disaster or persecution, we are blessed by being taken to be with Him, safe then and safe in the Final Judgement when the Lord Jesus returns. **Questions:** How do many people today look at wars and disasters? Why are some people going to be so terrified on the Day of Judgement? How should God’s children look at that Day?

Introduction:

First Point: The Four Horsemen

- 1) Christ’s Control: The Lord Jesus alone is worthy to open the seals – to fulfill, explain and implement God’s plan for history. He sends the Living Creatures to release the horses with their riders – heaven and earth follow His will that they “come forth” to do their duty
- 2) War, Disaster and Persecution: The will of God is that there will be war & disaster to punish the wicked and refine His people. See Zech. 1,6 and Ezk. 14 for similar visions re judgement in OT Israel’s time. This is indicated in summary by the first seal/rider on the white horse – symbolizing the conquest of war. Some say the rider is Christ, some say Satan, some conquest in general. The red horse represents bloodshed and slaughter, one aspect of war and disaster; the black = famine, another result of war and disaster – though the effect is limited by God so life may continue. The pale (green) = death, followed by hades, another result
- 3) Not Just Future: This picture is not about some time of tribulation just before Christ returns, but is sparked by His death, resurrection and ascension (see ch. 5). These things occur in the entire time from 1st to 2nd Coming. Hence Mt. 24 gives a similar description of the time leading up to Jerusalem’s judgement in AD 70. *Every* generation of Christians may take comfort from Christ’s control of war, disaster and persecution

Second Point: The Souls Under the Altar

- 1) Believers Will Suffer Too: God’s people are affected by these judgements too – for the Lord purifies His people by them, as well as dealing with the Church’s enemies. Hence the martyrs are shown under the “altar” in heaven, souls in disembodied state
- 2) The Altar in heaven: The altar refers either to the altar of burnt offering, meaning that the martyrs have offered their lives as an acceptable sacrifice in Christ; or the altar of incense, meaning that their prayers are made acceptable by His atoning blood.
- 3) How Long?: The martyrs are sad to see the state of the world and the persecution of the Church on earth. They want to see the vindication of God’s Name and people, along with the display of His justice upon His enemies. So they cry out, “How long?” But they – and we – must wait until God’s plan to gather all the martyrs (and elect) is complete. Meanwhile, they wait in peace in heaven, while there are also “survivors” preserved by God on earth (Ezk. 14:21-22)

Third Point: The Cosmic Collapse

- 1) The Ultimate Answer: The ultimate answer to the martyrs’ “How long?” is the final judgement, when all God’s enemies will be punished and His people vindicated. OT judgement-language is taken up to forewarn of a cosmic collapse. See Is. 2, 24; Jer. 4; Joel 2; Ezk. 32; Amos 8; Mic. 3 – and Mt. 24
- 2) A Day of Terror: The wicked will want to hide from God’s wrath on that Day – as Adam and Eve did in Eden. See also Is. 2:19, 34:4; Joel 2-3; Hos. 10. The Lord does not ignore the suffering of His people- He is angered by those who hate Him and persecute His Church. This is not only a reminder to us to trust His preserving grace; but also to keep being faithful, lest we join those who flee in terror

Conclusion

