

Lesson # 21 The Third Seal Judgment

Revelation 6:5-6

Date: Sept. 5, 2010

⁵When 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. ⁶And I heard what seemed to be 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 wine!"

As the 3rd seal is opened, a rider on a black horse is revealed, as it is called to come by the 3rd of the 4 Living Creatures. This rider has a balance in his hand - the type used to measure goods by weight. The black colour of the horse symbolizes mourning & weeping, and when combined with the balance in the rider's hand, the symbolism being described is a worldwide yet limited famine. In the midst of this famine, which creates serious problems for those who already have little or no means, the rich will apparently fare well, for a while at least.

The rider is again not a specific person, but is rather the personification of a power whose effect is famine. The natural reason for famine occurring here at this time, as it often is even in our current times, is the worldwide war caused by the rider on the red horse, the prior seal judgment. Notice **Matt. 24:7** & the progression that parallels this passage in Revelation. ①

The balance held by this rider – Greek “zygon” – is the word used for “yoke” as worn by cattle or oxen, but can also refer to a bar with scales on both ends or a weight on 1 side and a pan on the other. In the context of this seal judgment, it is pointing to the necessity of weighing out food because it is in short supply, therefore those who have it will get the absolute top price that the market will bear, at the expense of those who can least afford it.

In verse 6, there is a development not found in either of the 1st two seals, as another voice “from the midst of the 4 Living Creatures” calls out, *"A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"* Oddly, this is the description of the 3rd Seal judgment - a black horse, a rider with a balance and the words called out which we have just read. That's it, yet it is an ominous thing to consider, especially since this will be worldwide.

This voice comes from the midst of the Living Creatures, but not from one of them. Some say this is the voice of nature personified, or it is an unknown voice, but in the midst of the 4 Living Creatures is the throne & the Lamb. It makes the most sense to realize that this must be the voice of the Lamb who is describing the judgment, reading from the scroll, because He is the ultimate source of all the judgments.

The announcement focuses on 4 specific commodities – wheat, barley, oil & wine. The first 2 are dietary staples, to make flour & bread, for soup, etc. but the upshot of what is pronounced as a price for these 2 staples indicates a horrifying & gut-wrenching situation. One denarius was one day's wage for soldier or general labourer in those times. In good times, it was a fair wage and one could conceivably support a family on what it could purchase.

However, what this edict portrays is a scarcity of food so drastic that this same denarius would now only purchase 1 quart of wheat, the main staple grain of that time, and of better quality than barley, which is a much coarser grain. A quart of wheat would feed 1 person with a moderate appetite for 1 day. Barley, with less nutritional value, could be bought in larger quantities for that denarius – 3 quarts – but this too provided sustenance for only 1 person for 1 day, or meager supply for a family who would not get enough to eat.

Those who could not afford more because that's all they earned or were out of work entirely, and had no savings, could barely support themselves, let alone a family. In the aftermath of war, many would be out of work entirely, and crops will have been decimated, many people will have been killed, and businesses of all kinds wiped out – the world will have been “blown back to the stone age”.

Supply & demand will continue to be the measure of the value of a commodity. Those with ample access to food sources will be able to make much more money by raising prices to whatever the market will bear. In case you think that this famine is not a judgment from God, but is just a natural outcome of wartime, notice **Psalm 104:15-16**. Just as the famine described in this Psalm had immense purpose in God's plan, so too this famine will fulfill His purpose. ②

There is another aspect of this famine depicted at the end of v. 6. The oil mentioned is of course, in the context of food, olive oil. It was an extremely important commodity, used for heating, light, healing, to make bread, etc. and so was crucial to that living standard. It has less value to us today in our culture, but in that one, it was a necessity. Wine of course, was the main drink because of the abundance of vineyards and the fact that good, clean water was hard to come by and more dangerous to drink than wine. The wine of that day was often diluted by water significantly so that it was not a full strength alcoholic beverage in those times.

There is some question as to why this command went out to “not harm the oil & wine”. Is it meant to limit the authority of the ruler so that the price of these commodities does not go above a set limit, or are oil & wine a luxury category, meaning that the rich will remain insulated for now from the worst effects of the famine?

It seems likely that the latter idea is the correct one, meaning that the poor, the common people will experience the full brunt of the famine while the rich and powerful will experience only minor inconvenience. Part of the argument of this

view is that the rich and powerful seem to be specifically targeted in Seal Judgment # 6 (Rev. 6:15-17).

Inequity during this 3rd seal will be the order of the day. There will be absolutely no middle class remaining – only haves and have nots / rich & poor.

The wine mentioned alongside the oil also depicts that even during deep famine, there are those who will still be able to indulge in one of the simple pleasures of life which are being denied to the rest of humanity. It is implied that if you can afford wine, you are likely eating well too.

Some theologians – mostly preterists – see this injunction regarding the wine as a result of Domitian's fiat in AD 92 to prohibit the provinces in Asia from producing grapes in vineyards for wine, which was done to protect the Italian wine growing industry, but after heavy opposition, this law was repealed. It had nothing to do with famine however, and a famine as described herein is not a part of the known history of that area during this time.

So this rider is prohibited by God from damaging the oil & wine, thus leaving the privileged few relatively unscathed in this judgment – as they store up more wrath as a result of their callous indifference to the plight of the rest of their neighbours. This indifference is about to be put to tougher tests, and soon, no one of any level of social standing will be able to ignore the impending end of the world and of history.

Next lesson – Lesson # 22

Rev. 6: 7-8...The Fourth Seal Judgment / Rider on a Pale Horse