

## Lesson # 22 The Fourth Seal Judgment

## Revelation 6:7-8

Date: Sept. 26, 2010

*<sup>7</sup>When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"  
<sup>8</sup>And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.*

As the 4<sup>th</sup> seal is broken, the 4<sup>th</sup> Living Creature says "Come!", just as the other 3 before it had done, so that in the case of the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 seals, each of the 4 Living Creatures has a role to play as they call into the theatre of history the first 4 judgments of the End Times.

There is a sharp increase in the level of judgment with this horse & rider – the pale horse – in the Greek, "*chloros*" – a yellowish green colour, the colour of decay, the pallor of death.<sup>i</sup> We cannot in good sense attempt to look at what is described here as an historic event. There is nothing in known history that comes close to the level of sword, famine, disease, pestilence, & wild animal devastation that is depicted here. This is unique and the fact that ¼ of the world's population will be affected by it tends to ratchet up the intensity of God's judgment.

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This horse & rider come on the heels of broken peace, war & famine which had affected mostly the poor and middle classes, but now, it appears that even the rich & the great will not escape the torment, grief & carnage. It is certain that a bewildered & beleaguered world begins to suspect that these are not natural events but supernatural, because, by the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, people are proclaiming that this is the wrath of God – cf. **Rev. 6:15-17**.

This judgment has 3 components – a horse, a rider ( this time named "death" ) & Hades follows. This rider is the personification of death, and up until Rev. 21:4; 20:14; Hades always follows death for the lost. Hades is no longer the destination of believers, not since Christ rose from the dead and "led captivity captive". For the believer, since then, to die is gain and is to be in the presence of the Lord immediately. We will see in the 5<sup>th</sup> seal that many believers will die in the Tribulation Period, and there are many due to be martyred.

The progression of things working together to terrorize the people of earth is hideous even to imagine. What began as a worldwide peace degenerated after 3 ½ years seemingly overnight to become the stuff that nightmares are made of.

The Sword

The sword is listed first, and as the famine conditions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> seal intensify, it makes sense that the onslaught on people who have food and water is an inevitable result as those who have neither become desperate to get what they need to live at any cost. Violence is always the default route & remember that this is now a world in which the restraining power of the Holy Spirit and the church have been removed. – cf. **II Thess. 2:6-12**.

It is entirely plausible that “the sword” here depicts state executions of believers as well as wholesale violence. It is a simple step of logic to realize that when there is not enough food to go around, those who are enemies of the world state, those who will not worship Antichrist, will be expendable and a pragmatic solution would be to eliminate them quickly – see **Rev. 6:9**.

“The sword” probably goes beyond army against army too. Certainly, wars & skirmishes will be going on all over the world, but local battles will take place too – community on community, family against family, gangs against anyone who appears weaker than they are ( survival of the fittest ). The only benevolence will arise in Christians, new believers – cf. **Matt. 25:31-46** – as everyone else will be looking out for number 1. Laws & rules will become meaningless because the government will simply not be able to supply basic needs, and anarchy on a full scale will result. It is doubtful that our human minds can even conceive of the horror that awaits fulfillment in this seal.

## Famine

As this was the main power of the 3<sup>rd</sup> seal, by now, it has intensified to include even those who had power over the food supply, who still had access to oil & wine. If their supplies have not already run out, those who wield the sword will get it from them. The scope of the famine is wider – there will be no time to plant, harvest & process food if you are busy defending yourself against people whose only means of survival may be killing you.

## Pestilence

In **Ezek. 14:12-23**, these 4 plagues are associated with Ezekiel’s warning to Jerusalem, and 3 of the 4 ( sword, famine & pestilence ) are often connected in the OT.<sup>ii</sup> Pay attention to the sovereignty of God in Ezek. 14, because it plays a huge role in our text in Rev. 6 as well.

Pestilence is referring to fatal disease and this makes perfect biological sense that, when people are starving, dying of thirst and being killed in massive numbers, that disease will follow. Plagues like cholera, influenza, & dysentery will follow as birds of prey like vultures, buzzards & crows, alongside insects will become carriers of disease. These will transfer this disease to other people who are still healthy and worldwide infections will arise of a magnitude that the medical community will be powerless to contain.

## Wild Beasts

When many people read “wild beasts” they immediately think of lions, tigers, hyenas, wolves, bears, pythons, gators and wolverines, etc. Since there are only so many of these major predators in the world, the threat seems minor, but there are other categories of “wild beasts”.

What do you think is the most deadly animal on the planet? The rat. They breed incessantly, eat voraciously anything remotely edible, and survive just about anything – they are tough to kill by conventional means. Since they are relatively small and usually stay out of sight, we forget about them, but they destroy crops, eat through & contaminate stores of food and grains, carry disease ( Bubonic Plague among other things ), and they multiply rapidly in large numbers.

Insects are also technically ‘wild beasts’. Locusts destroy crops & all vegetation in their way, adding to famine conditions; mosquitoes bite people and transfer diseases; flies carry diseases of all kinds; swarms of killer bees are also out there; and fleas & ticks also bring great grief to humanity already. You name the bug & it is likely part of this judgment.

## God’s Sovereignty

Do you recall what we read in Ezek. 14? Note v. 13 – “I will stretch out My hand”<sup>③</sup>; v. 14 – “If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land”; v. 17 – “If I bring a sword on that land”; v. 19 – “If I send a pestilence”; v. 21 – “I send My 4 severe judgments”; v. 23b – “You shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done...”. See also **Ps. 105:14-25**.

Now notice our text – **Rev. 6:8b** – which we skipped over earlier. “and they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill...”. Where did these powers get their authority? From God – the only sovereign. This is not a world gone wild and the reins have been snatched from God’s hands! He is the absolute sovereign master over everything that is happening here – every death, every martyr, every crop & every germ or insect.

Whatever takes place during these seal judgments is all under His authority. Look at **Acts 12:1-19**. Do you see a sovereign God at work in this passage? James is martyred; yet Peter is miraculously freed. Do you think God could not have freed James too? It was God’s sovereign purpose and His will that James would die by the sword and that Peter would survive, even if that took a miracle. ( and also see **JN 21:18-19** ).

This same God will direct & oversee all the judgments on earth during the Tribulation. It says in Rev. 6:8 that a quarter of the earth’s population will die. The current population of earth is about 7.5 billion people. If the Rapture were to

happen today, and if we assume that 5% of the world is saved, 375 million people would disappear, leaving just over 7 billion on earth. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> seal, more than 25% of these would be dead ( we are not told the amounts in the first 3 seals ), therefore the death of 1.8 billion people is being described in the 4<sup>th</sup> seal!

How could it get any worse than that we ask? Yet, by the passages of Scripture's witness, these are the beginnings of birth pangs – it is about to get a whole lot worse for those who manage to stay alive after this.

Next lesson – Lesson # 23  
Rev. 6: 9-11...The 5th Seal Judgment / The Martyrs

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<sup>i</sup> Robert Thomas, Revelation 1-7; p. 436

<sup>ii</sup> IBIB, p. 438 – I Chron. 21:12; Jer. 14:12; 21:7; 24:10; 44:13; Ezek. 5:12; 6:11,12, etc.