

Chapter 6

1 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

1) In chapter 5 we saw the scroll in Daniel 12 as the scroll that Jesus unseals. In Daniel, chapter 11, the prophecy deals with the Seleucid Empire, then Rome's overtaking of that empire in 63 BC. The imagery of the horses patrolling the earth is to see if the Romans would overstep their boundaries. They were called by God to end the Seleucid Empire, keep in mind the abomination of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean Revolt. Now that Rome has power, the lamb will keep them in check. We can see how God monitored Assyria, who invaded the northern tribes and scattered them. They got arrogant and thought to defy God. Justice was served in Isaiah 37:36-38. See also Zechariah 1:12-17.

1) When Daniel described the Media/Persian empire in chapter 7 it was shown as a bear. Specific leaders of the same empire in chapter 8 were described as rams and goats. Daniel 7 describes Rome as a dreadful beast which is still prophetically at work, but we look to the horses here as identifying certain rulers. Read Joel 2:1-8 and see his description of the army as a horse. The Roman emperors and their army is comparable to this, while still referring to the entire empire as a dreadful beast.

1) In Zechariah 1 it shows the horses and the measuring line that God sends out before he returns his people back to their land. The horses were sent to patrol the earth, to see if the land was at peace. These horses are shown again in Zechariah 6 attached to the chariots. The four living creatures are compared to as God's chariot in Isaiah 66:15-16. In Ezekiel 1:4 the four creatures are chariots and a whirlwind. These horses in Ezekiel all show that God's judgement is at hand.

2) The white horse is peaceful, because in verse 3 peace is taken from the earth. The crown is "stephanos" or a victor's garland, or laurel wreath.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION: Pax Romana

2) The bow is significant because the Pax Romana (27 BC - 180 AD) emperors were from Crete, known for their archery skills.

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4 And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

4) John describes the red horse as people slaying one another, or civil war, and a great sword, death from the barbarian invasions (Ezekiel 21:14)

192 - 232 AD - In 192 AD Commodus was assassinated and this marks the end of the Golden Age of Rome, or the Pax Romana. The next 40 years show emperors being murdered, battling one another and trying to usurp their rivals. Wikipedia (Crisis of the Third Century) shows 24 failed usurpations from 192 - 285 AD.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION: Crisis of the Third Century

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. 6 And 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!"

From Barnes commentary on biblehub.com *"Black, in the Scriptures, is the image of fear, of famine, of death. Lamentations 5:10; "our skin was black like an oven, because of the terrible famine." Jeremiah 14:2; "because of the drought Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are in deep mourning (literally, black) for the land." Joel 2:6; "all faces shall gather blackness." Nahum 2:10; "the knees smite together, and there is great pain in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness." Compare Revelation 6:12; Ezekiel 32:7. See also Bochart, Hieroz. P. i. lib. ii. c. vii. pp. 106, 107. From the color of the horse here introduced we should naturally look for some dire calamity, though the nature of the calamity would not be designated by the mere use of the word "black." What the calamity was to be must be determined by what follows in the symbol. Famine, pestilence, oppression, heavy taxation, tyranny, invasion - any of these might be denoted by the color of the horse.*

(c) The balances: "and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand." The original word rendered here as "a pair of balances," is ζυγὸν zugon. This word properly means a yoke, serving to couple anything together, as a yoke for cattle. Hence it is used to denote the beam of a balance, or of a pair of scales - and is evidently so used here. The idea is, that something was to be weighed, in order to ascertain either its quantity or its value. Scales or balances are the emblems of justice or equity (compare Job 31:6; Psalm 62:9; Proverbs 11:1; Proverbs 16:11); and when joined with symbols that denote the sale of grain and fruit by weight, become the symbol of scarcity. Thus, "bread by weight" Leviticus 26:26 denotes scarcity. So in Ezekiel 4:16, "And they shall eat bread by weight." The use of balances here as a symbol would signify that something was to be accurately and carefully weighed out.

The connection leads us to suppose that this would pertain to the necessities of life, and that it would occur either in consequence of scarcity, or because there would be an accurate or severe exaction, as in collecting a revenue on these articles. The balance was commonly the symbol of equity and justice; but it was also, sometimes, the symbol of exaction and oppression, as in Hosea 12:7; "The balance of deceit is in his hands; he loveth to oppress."

5) Defining black as oppression as opposed to taxation is helpful going forward because the heavens are black in Revelation 6:12

5) See also the description of the black horse on Wikipedia "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse...as Imperial Oppression." This started with Caracalla in 211 AD and continuing with Maximin in 238 AD. This overlaps with the red horse above.

7 And when the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 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.

8) A fourth of the earth shows the time period after the Crisis of the Third Century when Rome was divided into four districts, called the Tetrarchy (c. 293-305 AD). See Strong's interpretation of fourth *Cognate: 5067 tétartos – fourth; (figuratively) a part of the whole (totality, all four quarters)*. It can be read as the four quarters of the earth. This will help the understanding of the interpretation because famine, pestilence and plague happened in all four parts of the empire.

8) (Wikipedia Four Horsemen) According to Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*: “famine, the inevitable consequence of carnage and oppression, which demolished the present crop as well as the hope of future harvests, produced the environment for an epidemic of diseases, the effects of scanty and unwholesome food. That furious plague (the Plague of Cyprian), which raged from 250 to 265, continued without interruption in every province, city and almost every family in the empire. During a portion of this time, 5000 people died daily in Rome; and many towns that had escaped the attacks of barbarians were entirely depopulated. For a time in the late 260s, the strength of Aurelian crushed the enemies of Rome, yet after his assassination a certain amount of them revived. While the Goths had been destroyed for almost a century and the Empire reunited, the Sassanid Persians were uncowed in the East and, during the following year, hosts of central Asian Alani spread themselves over Pontus, Cappadocia, Cilicia, and Galatia, etching their course by the flames of cities and villages they pillaged. As for the wild beasts of the Earth, according to Elliott, it is a well-known law of nature that they quickly occupy the scenes of waste and depopulation—where the reign of man fails and the reign of beasts begins. After the reign of Gallienus and 20 or 30 years had passed, the multiplication of the animals had risen to such an extent in parts of the empire that they made it a 'crying evil'.”

8) See how God enters into judgement in Ezekiel 38:21-23.

8) Here are some of the effects of the plague of Cyprian noted above: *fever, throat sores, diarrhea, exhaustion, vomiting, and gruesome skin lesions, with blood potentially coming from orifices like the nose and eyes.*

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

9) Souls that had been slain were taken under the severe persecution under Decius in 250 AD. They were crying out because more was to come.

8 & 9) Death and Hades were two different places for those that slept. See Luke 16:22

8 & 9) For simplicity, refer to Hades as what many Christians currently define as "hell." Death is what they call "heaven," even though it's below the earth, and what Jesus called "Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Death here is martyrdom of the saints, Hades would be death of the ungodly from the vengeance of Jesus. Hades is the Greek version of Sheol in Hebrew. The Diocletianic Persecution saw a relatively small number of deaths of Christians, but there was widespread suffering that involved severe torture, forced labor, imprisonment, and seizure of property, leading to many more deaths than just executions. This leads into verse 12.

11) The white robe is a high honor, they had given themselves to death just as our savior was called to. See the reward for these saints in chapter 7.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION: Diocletian Persecution 303-313 AD

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth (made of goat hair), the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter (unripe) fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The timing of this describes the division of the Roman Empire from Diocletian. The pale horse was given permission to patrol the entire empire, but this below applies to Diocletian's portion.

12) Earthquake: The breaking apart of the empire, There were three portions at the end of the Crisis. Diocletian divided it into East and West with a Caesar and an Augustus, making it the Tetrarchy. Diocletian was the main ruler (sun) and Galerius was his junior co-emperor (moon)

12) Sun black as sackcloth (made of goat hair) is the extremely oppressive. See "Diocletian" wikipedia: *On 23 February 303, Diocletian ordered that the newly built church at Nicomedia be razed. He demanded that its scriptures be burned, and seized its precious stores for the treasury. The next day, Diocletian's first "Edict against the Christians" was published. The edict ordered the destruction of Christian scriptures and places of worship across the empire, and prohibited Christians from assembling for worship.*

12) Full moon is the full power of Galerius to rule his own portion of the empire. The moon becoming like blood is to show how Galerius enforced his portion of the edict. From the wikipedia page "Diocletian Persecution" *Diocletian requested that the edict be pursued "without bloodshed", against Galerius's demands that all those refusing to sacrifice be burned alive. In spite of Diocletian's request, local judges often enforced executions during the persecution, as capital punishment was among their discretionary powers. Galerius's recommendation—burning alive—became a common method of executing Christians in the East. After the edict was posted in Nicomedia, a man named Eutius tore it down and ripped it up, shouting "Here are your Gothic and Sarmatian triumphs!" He was arrested for treason, tortured, and burned alive soon after, becoming the edict's first martyr.*

13) Stars of the sky fell are the fall of the holy ones, see Philipians 2:15.

13) Fig tree, unripe fruit - The fig tree is known to be Jerusalem (Jeremiah 24, Matthew 21 and 24). Here it links the persecution to include the Jewish Christians. God has not fulfilled the prophecies of bringing the fig tree back to life, so the figs are unripe, and they are swept off the branches by a strong wind. The wind is the anti-jewish propaganda that started during this time, despite the exclusion from them being persecuted. This verse is taking us forward in the prophecy to the more severe persecution and the diaspora after Constantine is emperor.

14) Sky vanish, rolled up like a scroll - shows the disappearance of the sun, moon and stars. A scroll is to show they will only survive in history, as in a scroll. This is showing the future fall of Rome after the trumpet judgements.

14) Mountain is a mighty system of leadership with a pinnacle expanding to being broad at the bottom, much like a government. There would not be any mountains of the Roman empire left as they were. Islands are smaller protrusions of land in the midst of the waters, or pockets of believers. The structure of power will be moved, and expect another diaspora. One part of this fulfillment is Rome, once a mighty city of over a million, dwindles down to a mere tens of thousands after the trumpet judgements.

See Isaiah 34 on the judgement of Assyria, Babylon and the others that attacked Israel and Judah. This finishes the judgement of the little scroll. Rome was to put to an end the autocracies of the Seleucid empire (Daniel 8), but they overstepped their power and put to death the body of Christ. The end of the Roman empire left a vacuum of leadership which is termed the dark ages, and was literally darkened by the series of volcanoes that erupted. The "Volcanic Winter" affected rich and poor alike, and would have struck all with fear and worry as devastation covered the earth.

From Wikipedia "Volcanic Winter of 536" In 538, the Roman statesman Cassiodorus described the following to one of his subordinates in letter 25:

The sun's rays were weak, and they appeared a "bluish" colour.
At noon, no shadows from people were visible on the ground.
The heat from the sun was feeble.
The moon, even when full, was "empty of splendour"
"A winter without storms, a spring without mildness, and a summer without heat"
Prolonged frost and unseasonable drought
The seasons "seem to be all jumbled up together"
The sky is described as "blended with alien elements" just like cloudy weather, except prolonged. It was "stretched like a hide across the sky" and prevented the "true colours" of the sun and moon from being seen, along with the sun's warmth.
Frosts during harvest, which made apples harden and grapes sour.
The need to use stored food to last through the situation.
Subsequent letters (no. 26 and 27) discuss plans to relieve a widespread famine.
In the entry corresponding to the year 535–536, the early 7th century Mandaean Book of Kings relates, "were you to request a tenth of a peck of grain in the land Gawkāy for five staters, we would look but it would not be found,"[8] an exchange of 873 grams of grain for 43 grams of gold, reflecting the scarcity of grain during this time.
Michael the Syrian (1126–1199), a patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, reported that during 536–537 the sun shone feebly for a year and a half.

Fellow body of Christ, the benefit of studying this prophecy is to show God's unchanging nature. Even though this was fulfilled over 1500 years ago, the system of judgement is the same. Jesus is now at the helm of power, he was given the authority to judge from the father. He is our perfect judge, he knows every temptation and suffering because he was born into our humanity. The fall of Rome is the judgement of one of the heads of the red dragon beast (Chapter 17) and that beast will be completely destroyed (Revelation 20). The dragon is Babylon, and any nation that follows after Babylon will be destroyed like Rome was. The coming of Jesus (Revelation 1:7) is a test of our faithfulness. There is a reason he's called a lion! Guard your hearts, understand the workings of justice, and keep your hearts prepared for the suffering to come. Psalm 91 is your shield against the coming death, famine, plague, civil war, taxation, and persecution. Be prepared to give your life as Christ was prepared, and receive your white robe if that is your calling.