

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #9

PREFACE

The title of last week’s session was “Cause and Effect”—regarding the *cause* of the Rapture being the event that makes possible the *effect* of the Tribulation—and we will see a second cause-and-effect being played out, as we examine the first four seals in the scroll just opened by the “Lamb that was slain.”

The events triggered by the breaking of the first four seals have traditionally been referred to in popular culture as “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” But we are more interested in what they *do*, than what they are called. What we know from the narrative is that everything that transpires from the breaking of these seven seals is of God (for the document was written in eternity past *by* the Godhead), and, especially with the first four seals, is part of what Jesus referred to as “merely the beginning of birth pangs” ([Matthew 24:8](#)), which means it is just Act One of the final and full-flowering of God’s wrath upon a humanity clinging desperately to its sin.

Note: During my preliminary sketching out of this study, I followed the traditional—and, admittedly, textual—perspective of dividing the Tribulation into two, three-and-one-half-years parts, intending to eventually assign every event to one or the other, or to the dramatic midpoint. Further study, however, has steered me away from that. The Tribulation events recorded in the prophecies are not so neatly assigned to a sequence corresponding to the manner in which they have been recorded. We will see that clearly in just the first seven events contained in the seals.

Thus it is not just difficult, but ultimately (in my opinion) inconsequential, to force an event into one half or the other. God’s word—and thus God Himself—does not so neatly package the events of the Tribulation. Taking the prophetic references as a whole—not just Revelation, but Daniel, Isaiah, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Joel, et al—the impression one gets is that the Lord God sees all of this as one, seamless tapestry. Now, to be clear, this is not to say that we cannot put it into some coherent order; it *is* to say that it is not *written* in that order, to the extent that there will be some events, or mile-markers, that cannot ultimately be assigned to one half of the Tribulation or the other. What is demonstrably clear, however, is that from beginning to end, the events of the Tribulation comprise a steady crescendo of violence, pain, and suffering for those on earth.

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

We may not be able to identify the next two riders, but we can certainly identify the ones *calling out* the four riders. In Chapter Six we are told that the ones “saying as with a voice of thunder”—that is, with a sound of an approaching storm—“Come!” are “the four living creatures” (v1). These creatures were introduced in Chapter Four.

Read Revelation 4:6-8.

zoon (dzo'-on) = (neuter) a *live* thing, i.e., an animal, a beast (KJV always translates as “beast”).

We need not dwell on their appearance, which is bizarre, to say the least. But remember that John, like all the prophets being favored with visions, struggles to put into earthly words what he is seeing in his vision of the throne of heaven. These are the creatures—so strange from an earthly perspective, yet so favored as to be the things stationed closest to the holy throne of Father God—who call forth each of the four riders on the colored steeds.

Please turn to Revelation 6; you also may wish to refer to Chart #9, which was distributed with Session 11 notes.

The first rider, pictured as he is as a victorious warrior on an historically appropriate white steed—i.e., the white horse of a victorious general in his victory procession—we have identified as Antichrist.

Sidebar: Let me add just a few more thoughts on the position that the first rider upon a white horse is *not* Christ.

Isbon T. Beckwith: the first rider unquestionably symbolizes the victorious warrior, ... it is hardly conceivable that Christ should be represented here as the Lamb in the court of heaven breaking the seal, and at the same time by that act revealing himself as a figure coming into view from another quarter, and in another form, in response to a summons from an archangel...

I would add to this that this would mean that Christ continues to break the subsequent seals in the scroll *after* He has just departed on the white horse!

Arthur S. Peake: Moreover it brings Him on the scene much too early; for it is not till a very late point in the development that He enters on His victorious career. This identification should therefore be set aside without hesitation.

The next two riders can only be identified by what they *do*, not by who they *are*.

THE SECOND SEAL: WAR (REVELATION 6:3-4)

And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

Here is a reverberating echo of the cause-and-effect that inaugurated the Tribulation in the first place—both of which put the lie to the popular notion that “all people are basically good.” What will be required for the appearance of Antichrist and the start of the Tribulation? Only the *removal* of the church and the Holy Spirit. What will be required for wars to break out, with men slaying one another? Only the removal of peace. Appreciate the sublime truth of that simple statement: to the rider “it was granted to take peace from the earth.” It will not be necessary for him to *create* war, for that proclivity already dwells within the hearts of men. He need only remove the restraint of “peace.” Thus, early on at the outset of the Tribulation, when peace is removed from the earth, from then on it will be no holds barred. All restraints will have been removed.

THE THIRD SEAL: FAMINE (REVELATION 6:5-6)

I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.”

Now we are beginning to see the second instance of a cause-and-effect during the Tribulation:

- the first seal introduces to the world the one who is up to no good: Antichrist;
- the second seal removes the existence of peace, which results in war;
- the third seal, as is customary with war, results in famine;
- the fourth seal will bring the ultimate effect of war and famine: death.

John F. Walvoord brings v6 into perspective for us.

Walvoord: In order to determine the meaning of this vision it must be understood that the silver coin designated as a penny [KJV] is actually the Roman denarius, worth about fifteen cents. In the wage scale of that time it was common for a person to receive one denarius for an entire day’s work [NIVs]. For such a coin, one measure of wheat or three measures of barley could be purchased in the vision here. The explanation seems to be this: A measure of wheat is approximately what a laboring man would eat in one meal. If he used his penny to buy barley, a cheaper grain, he would have enough from an entire day’s wages to buy three good meals of barley. If he bought wheat, a more precious grain, he would be able to buy enough for only one meal.

There would be no money left to buy other things, such as oil or wine, which were considered essential in biblical times. To put it in ordinary language, the situation would be such that one would have to spend a day's wages for a loaf of bread with no money left to buy anything else. The symbolism therefore indicates a time of famine when life will be reduced to the barest necessities; for famine is almost always the aftermath of war. The somber picture is emphasized by the color of the horse, black being the symbol of suffering.

Jesus describes these early days of the Tribulation, and it sounds pretty grim, but He points out that this is just the beginning.

Read Matthew 24:6-8.

We have to admit that at this point, this all sounds disturbingly familiar; Jesus and even the Revelation narrative could be describing the world in which we live now. (Some commentators conclude that Jesus' remarks are indeed limited to His and our time—i.e., for believers during the dispensation of grace, the church age.) We might even shrug our shoulders and respond with, "What's the big deal?" We know that, historically, there have been periods in world history when it has been far worse than it is today. So it is easy to see how some could deduce that we are indeed living in the Tribulation now—or that the world has already passed through it. Inflation was so bad in Germany prior to WW2 that it was said that people would need a wheelbarrow full of marks just to do the grocery shopping. There are people literally starving to death today, and wars of conquest are occurring—even as they have occurred *throughout* man's history. Death—even violent death—has never left us.

As Jesus said, however, this moment in the Tribulation is just the beginning; the suffering and havoc are just getting started. Musically, this is just the start of the seven-year crescendo, with its end—its crashing *fortissimo* climax—at the moment Christ Jesus returns in judgment and stands astride the hills around Jerusalem.

THE FOURTH SEAL: DEATH (REVELATION 6:7-8)

I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

With the breaking of this fourth seal things are getting serious. Now we can no longer shrug our shoulders and assume that this all refers to the world in which we presently live. Never before in the history of Man has Death been granted "authority over a fourth of the earth."

We had better define some terms before we proceed. The word in v8 translated “ashen” or “pale” (*chloros*) in our other versions does not mean a light gray or dappled color, but more of a pale, sick, yellowish green. It was the color of my face in the first couple of days on ship bound for Vietnam—green around the gills—before I acquired my sea legs. It is the color of flesh when all the blood has been drained away—thus, the cadaverous color of death.

And the rider of this horse is, by name, Death (*thanatos*)—literally, *the* Death. In the Revelation “death” is personified which, to my mind, reveals and emphasizes God’s power over it. There will come a day, at the Great White throne of Judgment, when death itself, along with Hades will be “thrown into the lake of fire.”

Read Revelation 20:13-15.

Dr. Walter Schmithals (in Dictionary of New Testament Theology): In the NT death is regarded not as a natural process, but as an historical event, indicating clearly the sinful condition of man. In this historical sense death is seen as a power which enslaves man in the course of this life ([Hebrews 2:14-15](#)). Hence it appears sometimes in a quasi-personal form ([Revelation 20:14](#)).

Right now, as the Hebrews text reveals, Satan holds the power of death. But even before the Great White Throne Judgment, Satan will precede death and Hades into the lake of fire, where they all “will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

As to “Hades,” (in all our versions but the KJV, which has “Hell”) things get murky. The word, faithfully transliterated from the Greek *hades*, means something different in secular Greek to the OT Septuagint, and different in the Septuagint to the NT. Generally, this word corresponds to the OT “Sheol,” and is “a temporary place or state.” In the NT, in Christ, it takes on a new meaning: through the power of his resurrection, Christ has taken the power of death and the devil from them; He is now Lord of the dead and of the living ([Romans 14:9](#)). Hades cannot affect the church ([Matthew 16:18-19](#)), and any believer who dies is united with Christ, even if not yet in a glorified body.

It is not clear from the text whether Hades follows along behind Death separately or on the same horse. It is a small point. The larger point is, this is the first instance in the seals and the Tribulation of measured, incremental, earthly destruction. These two “beings”—Death and Hades—are granted authority, power over one-fourth of the earth (*ge; yee*), “ a general word referring to the inhabited world and in this context apparently extends to the entire earth” (Walvoord).

Are they given this authority for the benefit of mankind, to encourage righteousness and justice for all? No, “to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.” This describes an unprecedented level of death and destruction. The world population is presently around eight billion people; one quarter of that would be *two billion* killed.

The text describing the events of the fourth seal demonstrate the amorphous structure of the Tribulation narrative. This text (v8) surely describes a level of death and destruction that fits what Jesus calls “a great tribulation.” Yet it is placed here in the early days of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. So we have to ask, Does this point to or foreshadow later events, those that take place during the second half of the Tribulation? Or does it mean that “Death and Hades” are just here *beginning* their work of culling one quarter of the world’s population, a process that will be spread over the next seven years? It is impossible to say conclusively, so *this* teacher, for one, would rather not say.

We *can* say this: v8 truly describes a level of devastation heretofore unimaginable, which means it fits perfectly into all prophetic passages regarding the Eschaton, whether OT or NT. It will be a time when those on earth will wish they weren’t.

Blow a trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
For the day of the LORD is coming;
Surely it is near,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness.
As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
So there is a great and mighty people;
There has never been anything like it,
Nor will there be again after it
To the years of many generations.
A fire consumes before them
And behind them a flame burns.
The land is like the garden of Eden before them
But a desolate wilderness behind them,
And nothing at all escapes them.
Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like war horses, so they run.
With a noise as of chariots
They leap on the tops of the mountains,
Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble,
Like a mighty people arranged for battle.
Before them the people are in anguish;
All faces turn pale.
(Joel 2:1-6)