



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 18

Text: Rev. 6:1-8
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2. What the text means.

Seals One through Four

Greek NT	Gute Nachricht Bibel	NRSV	NLT
<p>6.1 Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὸ ἄρνιον μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ σφραγίδων, καὶ ἤκουσα ἑνὸς ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγοντος ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς· ἔρχου. 2 καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος λευκός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἔχων τόξον καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στέφανος καὶ ἐξήλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ.</p> <p>3 Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν δευτέραν, ἤκουσα τοῦ δευτέρου ζώου λέγοντος· ἔρχου. 4 καὶ ἐξήλθεν ἄλλος ἵππος πυρρός, καὶ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἐδόθη αὐτῷ λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἵνα ἀλλήλους σφάζουσιν καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ μάχαιρα μεγάλη.</p> <p>5 Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τρίτην, ἤκουσα τοῦ τρίτου ζώου λέγοντος· ἔρχου. καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος μέλας, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἔχων ζυγὸν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ. 6 καὶ ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγουσαν· χοῖνιξ σίτου δηναρίου καὶ τρεῖς χοίνικες κριθῶν δηναρίου, καὶ τὸ ἔλαιον καὶ τὸν οἶνον μὴ ἀδικήσῃς.</p> <p>7 Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην, ἤκουσα φωνὴν τοῦ τετάρτου ζώου λέγοντος· ἔρχου. 8</p>	<p>6.1 Dann sah ich, wie das Lamm das erste von den sieben Siegeln aufbrach. Und ich hörte, wie eine der vier mächtigen Gestalten* mit Donnerstimme sagte: »Komm!« 2 Ich schaute hin, da kam ein weißes Pferd. Sein Reiter hatte einen Bogen und erhielt eine Krone*. Als Sieger zog er aus, um zu siegen.</p> <p>3 Dann brach das Lamm das zweite Siegel auf. Ich hörte, wie die zweite der mächtigen Gestalten sagte: »Komm!« 4 Da kam ein anderes Pferd hervor, ein feuerrotes. Sein Reiter wurde ermächtigt, den Frieden von der Erde zu nehmen, damit sich die Menschen gegenseitig töteten. Dazu wurde ihm ein großes Schwert gegeben.</p> <p>5 Dann brach das Lamm das dritte Siegel auf. Ich hörte, wie die dritte der mächtigen Gestalten sagte: »Komm!« Ich schaute hin, da kam ein schwarzes Pferd. Sein Reiter hielt eine Waage in der Hand. 6 Aus dem Kreis der vier mächtigen Gestalten hörte ich eine Stimme rufen: »Eine Ration Weizen oder drei Rationen Gerste für den Lohn eines ganzen Tages. Nur Öl und Wein zum alten Preis!«</p> <p>7 Dann brach das Lamm</p>	<p>6.1 Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.</p> <p>3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, "Come!" 4 And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.</p> <p>5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held 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 day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!"</p> <p>7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!" 8 I looked and there was a pale green horse!</p>	<p>6.1 Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.</p> <p>3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, "Come!" 4 And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.</p> <p>5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held 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 day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!"</p> <p>7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!" 8 I looked and there was a pale green horse!</p>

καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ ἵππος
 χλωρὸς, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος
 ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ὄνομα αὐτῷ
 [ὁ] θάνατος, καὶ ὁ ἄδης
 ἠκολούθει μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ
 ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία
 ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς
 ἀποκτεῖναι ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ
 καὶ ἐν λιμῷ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ
 καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων τῆς
 γῆς.

das vierte Siegel auf. Ich hörte,
 wie die vierte der mächtigen Ge-
 stallten sagte: »Komm!« 8 Ich
 schaute hin, da kam ein leichen-
 farbenes Pferd. Sein Reiter hieß
 Tod, und die Totenwelt* folgte
 ihm auf den Fersen. Ein Viertel
 der Erde wurde in ihre Macht ge-
 geben. Durch das Schwert, durch
 Hunger, Seuchen und wilde Tiere
 sollten sie die Menschen töten.

Its rider's name was Death, and
 Hades followed with him; they
 I looked and there was
 were given authority over a fourth
 of the earth, to kill with sword,
 famine, and pestilence, and by
 the wild animals of the earth.



ture call out, "Come!" 8
 a pale green horse! Its
 rider's name was Death,
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 thority over a fourth of the
 earth, to kill with sword,
 famine, and pestilence,
 and by the wild animals
 of the earth.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter six begins the unrolling of the scroll that the Lamb has received from the One sitting on the throne. The disclosure of the eternal will of God begins with this unrolling. What has largely been hidden from human view will now be made known first in heaven to those present around the throne. Ultimately we participate in that because John in his apocalyptic vision is one of those present and has a divine mandate to write down what he sees. Thus through John, this disclosure becomes available to God's people on earth.

The dramatic narrative of the unrolling of the scroll to each of the seven seals located in different sections of this scroll is recorded in 6:1 through 8:1. The ritual of opening each seal is pretty much the same with the first four seals but shifts in seals five through seven:

Seal one (vv. 1-2):

Lamb opens the seal

One of the creatures cries, "Come."

John looks to see what emerges: white horse

Seal two (vv. 3-4):

Lamb opens the seal

Second one of the creatures cries, "Come."

John looks to see what emerges: red horse

Seal three (vv. 5-6):

Lamb opens the seal

Third one of the creatures cries, "Come."

John looks to see what emerges: black horse

Seal four (vv. 7-8):

Lamb opens the seal

Fourth one of the creatures cries, "Come."

John looks to see what emerges: green horse

Seal five (vv. 9-11):

Lamb opens the seal

John sees martyrs under the altar

Seal six (6:12-17):

Lamb opens the seal

John sees natural disasters on earth

The numbering of the sealed (7:1-17)

Seal seven (8:1):

Lamb opens the seal

Silence follows

Sets up the stage for the seven trumpets

In the first four seals, each of the four living creatures give the invitation to the rider the come out of the scroll as it is unrolled. Four mounted horses appear with individual tasks to do on earth. The pattern shifts dramatically with the final three seals, as they signal a shift in emphasis and disclosure. These actions in 6:9 through 8:1 center on God's 'marking' of His own people in anticipation of the eventual destruction of the earth.

The drama emerging here builds to the existence of the martyred individuals before the throne of God in the sixth seal (6:9-11), and from there focuses on God's marking out of all His people in anticipation of ultimate destruction of everyone and everything else.

For John's first readers in the seven churches, most of whom were suffering persecution, these images provided powerful reassurance that God had not overlooked or forgotten about them. The same message comes across to believers of all ages as a powerful reminder that no matter how hard or discouraging things may become, God remembers His people and their future is completely secure in His hands.

We have lots to learn then from this disclosure of God's plan and will for human history.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As is usually the case in the apocalyptic visions materials, the historical aspects will center on the external history, i.e., the history of the hand copying of the texts for the first several centuries of the Christian era. The literary aspects will play an important role in the interpretive process.

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the process of hand copying this text through the middle ages of the Christian era, seven places of variation in the wording of the text surface that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) considered important enough to impact the translation of the text. Each



verse except verse three contains a set of variant readings.

Verse 1: Ἐρχου, *come*.¹ Copyists were unclear about whether the admonition “Come” was addressed to John or to the rider on the white horse.² The shorter reading Ἐρχου has better support internally and externally, and thus should be the adopted reading.

Verse 2: καὶ εἶδον, *and I saw*.³ Several manuscripts omit this phrase due to καὶ ἴδε being added in verse one.⁴ Again the evidence favors the inclusion of this phrase over omitting it.

Verse 4: καὶ, *and*.⁵ This shorter reading is expand-

¹{B} Ἐρχου (see footnote 2 and 6.3-4, 5, 7-8) A C P 1006 1611 1841 1854 2053 2351 vg^{ww, st} cop^{sa, bo} arm Andrew // Ἐρχου καὶ ἴδε κ 205 209 2329 2344 Byz [046] it^{(ar), gig} vg^{cl} syr^{ph, h, with*} (eth) Victorinus-Pettau Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

^{2c}After ἔρχου, which has good manuscript support, several witnesses add καὶ ἴδε (and see) or καὶ βλέπε (and look). Such an addition assumes that the verb ἔρχου was addressed to John, but the reading in the text should be understood as addressed to the rider on the horse. The command means ‘come forth from where you are’ and not ‘come to heaven.’ It is also possible to translate ἔρχου as ‘Go!’ Perhaps the imperative ‘look’ was ‘an intentional alteration arising from the theological difficulty of such devilish characters as the four horsemen being directly commanded by God to induce such terrible sufferings on humankind’ (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 374).” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 532.]

³{B} καὶ εἶδον (see footnote 1 and 6.3-4, 5, 7-8) κ A C P 205 209 1006 1611 1841 2053 2344 it^{gig} vg syr^h cop^{(sa), bo} arm eth Andrew // καὶ ἤκουσα ἐνὸς καὶ εἶδον syr^{ph} // omit 1854 2329 2351 Byz [046] it^{ar} vg^{mss} Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

^{4c}The words καὶ εἶδον are absent from many minuscules (most of which add καὶ ἴδε in v. 1; see the previous entry) and a few other witnesses. The words, however, have good manuscript support; and they were omitted either accidentally (ΚΑΙΕΙΔΟΝΚΑΙΙΔΟΥ), or deliberately on the part of copyists of the manuscripts that read καὶ ἴδε at the end of v. 1 (who therefore would naturally have regarded καὶ εἶδον as unnecessary). The reading καὶ ἤκουσα καὶ εἶδον (and I heard and saw), found only in syr^{ph}, is due to freedom in translation.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 532–533.]

⁵{B} Ἐρχου. καὶ A C 1006 1611 1841 1854 2053 2329 2351 Byz [P 046] vg^{ww, st} syr^{ph, h} cop^{sa, bo} arm Andrew // Ἐρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ 205 209 2344 it^{ar}, gig vg^{cl} cop^{bo} (eth) Primasius Beatus // Ἐρχου καὶ ἴδε. Καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ (see 6.1-2, 5, 7-8) κ

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised

ed with either καὶ ἴδε or καὶ βλέπε being added after ἔρχου at the end of verse three.⁶ Again strong support for the shorter reading ἔρχου. καὶ favors it over the alternatives.

Verse 5: Ἐρχου, *come*.⁷ This is essentially the very same issue as with Ἐρχου in verse one, and with the same evidence that favors this shorter reading.

καὶ εἶδον, *and I saw*.⁸ The variation here from the adopted text parallels the same one in verse two. The evidence strongly favors including καὶ εἶδον.

Verse 7: Ἐρχου, *come*.⁹ Once again confusion prevailed over who this command was directed to. The same evidence and evaluation as given for verse one applies here as well.

Verse 8: καὶ εἶδον, *and I saw*.¹⁰ Once again this variation matches καὶ εἶδον in verses five and two. The

Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

^{6c}As in ver. 1, after ἔρχου, which is here well supported by A C P 046 1006 1611 1854 2053 vg syr^{ph, h} cop^{sa, bo} al, several witnesses (including κ 1828 2073 2344 it^{gig, ar} cop^{bo, ms} al) add καὶ ἴδε, while a few others (296 2049 followed by the Textus Receptus) add καὶ βλέπε. (See also the comment on ἔρχου, in ver. 1.)” [Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 668.]

⁷{B} Ἐρχου (see footnote 5 and 6.1-2, 3, 7-8) A C P 1006 1611 1841 (1854) 2053 2351 it^{gig} vg^{ww, ts} syr^{ph} cop^{sa, bo} arm Andrew // Ἐρχου καὶ ἴδε κ 205 209 2329 2344 Byz [046] it^{ar} vg^{cl} syr^h with * (eth) Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁸{B} καὶ εἶδον (see footnote 4 and 6.1-2, 3, 7-8) κ A C P 205 209 1006 1611 1841 2053 vg^{ww, st} syr^h cop^{bo} arm Andrew; (Primasius) omit 1854 2329 2344 2351 Byz [046] it^{ar, gig} vg^{cl} syr^{ph} cop^{sa} eth Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁹{B} Ἐρχου (see footnote 7 and 6.1-2, 3, 5) Avid C P 1006 1611 1841 1854 2053 2329 2351 vg^{ww, st} syr^{ph} cop^{sa, bo} arm Andrew // Ἐρχου καὶ ἴδε κ 205 209 2344 Byz [046] it^{ar}, gig vg^{cl} syr^h with * (eth) Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

¹⁰{B} καὶ εἶδον (see footnote 6 and 6.1-2, 3, 5) κ A (C 2053 omit καὶ) P 205 209 1006 1611 1841 it^{ar} vg^{ww, st} syr^{ph, h} cop^{sams, (sams), bo} arm Andrew // omit 1854 2329 2344 2351 Byz [046] it^{gig} vg^{cl} eth Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

same assessment applies to all three variations. These impact the punctuation of the text as well.¹¹

As one might expect a much larger number of variations in readings surface with a comparison of all of the existing manuscripts of this passage. The text apparatus of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed) contains a listing of these.¹² What one notices in these 29



^{11c}1.j. Variants affecting punctuation: (1) ἔρχου. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] A C 025 Oecumenius²⁰⁵³ fam 1006¹⁰⁰⁶ fam 1611^{1854 2329} Andreas cop; Nestle-Aland²⁷; UBSGNT⁴; TCGNT², 667. (2) ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ ἰδοῦ] Byzantine. (3) ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] κ 046 it^{gig} syr^h ph eth. The Byzantine tradition has altered εἶδον, ‘I saw,’ to ἴδε, ‘see,’ evident since the phrase καὶ ἴδε does not occur in any textually certain passage in Revelation (Charles, 1:clxii), a second-person imper. form apparently addressed to John (cf. the identical phrase in John 1:46). This constitutes evidence that κ has conflated the original reading with a distinctively Byzantine reading (Bousset [1906] 264 n. 2; Charles, 1:clxii; Schmid, Studien 2:129). A similar pattern of variants occurs in 6:3–8:

6:3–4 ἔρχου. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] A C Andreas
ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ ἰδοῦ] Byzantine
ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] κ 046

6:5–6 ἔρχου. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] A C Andreas
ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ ἰδοῦ] Byzantine
ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] κ 046

6:7–8 ἔρχου. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] A C Andreas
ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ ἰδοῦ] Byzantine
ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ] κ 046

Just as in 6:1–2, the Byzantine tradition has altered εἶδον to ἴδε, and the tradition represented by κ and 046 has conflated the two readings (Schmid, Studien 2:129).¹²

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 380.]

¹²Offenbarung 6,1

* οτι 2053. 2351 M^K vg (ὅτε is replaced with ὅτι)

* 2344 M^A sy^h co (ἐπτὰ is omitted)

* † –νῆ 2329 pc (variations in spelling of φωνῆ)

| –νην κ 1854. 2053 pc

| –νης P pc

| txt m (A C sine acc.)

* καὶ ἴδε κ 2329. 2344 M^K it vg^{cl} sy^h h^{**}; Vic Prim Bea (καὶ ἴδε is inserted after ἔρχου)

Offenbarung 6,2

* 2329. 2351 M^K ar; Prim Bea (καὶ εἶδον is omitted)

* 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053 pc latt sy^h; Ir^{lat} (καὶ is omitted)

* ενικησεν κ 2344 sa^{ms} bo (ἵνα νικήσῃ is replaced with ἐνικήσεν)

Offenbarung 6,3

* καὶ ἴδε κ 2344 pc it vg^{cl} bo^{ms}; Prim Bea (καὶ ἴδε is inserted after ἔρχου)

Offenbarung 6,4

* εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ κ pc (bo) (εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ is inserted after initial καὶ)

* πυρος A M (bo) (πυρρός is replaced by πυρός)

| txt κ C 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053 al latt sy sa

variations of readings, excluding the 7 listed above, is either attempts to improve the style of the Greek expression or else careless copying because they did not read their exemplar correctly.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text with high confidence that it reflects the original wording of this passage.

Internal History. The apocalyptic nature of this text posits action on earth that is directed by God from heaven. The four calvary men and their horses represent an adaptation by John of Zechariah 1:7-11 and 6:1-8, although some related imagery was connected to the Greek god Zeus in the ancient world as well. The creativity of John comes to the forefront here in this passage.

Literary Aspects:

* κ^l A 2344 pc (αὐτῶ is omitted)

* απο 2053 pc (ἐκ is replaced either with ἀπὸ or ἐπὶ)

| επι 2344

| – A al (κ^l om. εκ. τ. γ.)

*¹ 1611. 2053. 2351 M^K sy^h (καὶ is omitted before ἵνα)

*¹ –ξωσιν κ M (alternative spelling for σφάζουσιν)

| txt A C 2329

Offenbarung 6,5

* καὶ ἴδε κ 2329. 2344 M^K ar vg^{cl} sy^h h^{**}; Prim Bea (καὶ ἴδε is inserted after ἔρχου)

* 1854 M^K ar gig vg^{cl} sy^h sa; Bea (καὶ εἶδον is omitted after ἔρχου)

Offenbarung 6,6

* 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053 M^K sy co; Prim Bea (ὡς is omitted)

* –θης 2344. 2351 M^K sy^h (alternative spelling for κριθῶν)

* του A (τοῦ is inserted before δηναρίου)

Offenbarung 6,7

* C P 1611. 1854. 2053. 2329. 2351 M gig sy^h bo; Prim Bea (φωνῆν is omitted)

| txt P²⁴ κ A 1006. 1841. 2344 M^A lat sy^h sa

* καὶ ἴδε κ M^K it vg^{cl} sy^h h^{**}; Prim Bea (καὶ ἴδε is inserted after ἔρχου)

Offenbarung 6,8

* 1854. 2329. 2351 M^K gig vg^{cl}; Bea (καὶ εἶδον is omitted)

* C (ὁ is omitted before καθημενος)

* I C 1611. 2053 M^A vgst (ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ is replaced with ἐπ’ αὐτὸν)

| επ αυτον 1854 pc

*¹ κ C 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053 pc (ὁ is omitted before θάνατος)

| txt A M

* αθαν– A (alternative spelling for θάνατος)

* ακολ– M^A sy co; Vic (alternative spelling for ἠκολούθει)

* οπισω αυτ. 2329 pc sy^h (μετ’ αὐτοῦ is replaced with one of these two alternatives)

| αυτω κ 1006. 1841. 1854. (2053*). 2344. 2351 mK syph

| txt A C 1611 M^A

*¹ αυτω 1611. 1854. 2329. 2351 M^K lat sy co (alternative spelling for αὐτοῖς)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 643–644.]

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

Just a quick glance at the above block diagram reveals a repetitive pattern in the structuring of ideas. The four horses become clearly the four core sub-units of thought expression: White horse, #s 176-182; Red horse, #s 183-186; black horse, #s 187-191; Green horse, #s 192-197. Inside each of the units stands a core structure as the foundation for all for sub-units.



At the first level is a threefold structure of the Lamb opening a seal and one of the four living creatures speaking saying, “Come!” This is followed by a horse and rider coming out of the scroll and being given a job to do on earth. The pattern is repeated this way all four times:

- 1) First seal, vv. 1-2 (#s 176-182)
 - a) Lamb opens one of the seals
 - b) First living creature cries “Come!”
 - c) White horse emerges from the scroll
- 2) Second seal, vv. 3-4 (#s 183-186)
 - a) Lamb opens second seal
 - b) Second living creature calls out, “Come!”
 - c) Red horse emerges from the scroll
- 3) Third seal, vv. 5-6 (#s 187-191)
 - a) Lamb opens third seal
 - b) Third living creature calls out, “Come!”
 - c) Black horse emerges from the scroll
- 4) Fourth seal, vv. 7-8 (#s 192-197)
 - a) Lamb opens fourth seal
 - b) Fourth living creature calls out, “Come!”
 - c) Green horse emerges from scroll

From this common structure surface also distinctives for each of the four seals and their opening.¹³ Of

¹³“Within the literary framework of the breaking of the seven seals, the first four seals constitute a coherent literary unit. This is obvious in view of the stereotypical structure with variations that characterizes the brief narrative describing the breaking of the first four seals. Further, the cumulative effect of the four cavaliers on the inhabitants of the earth is described in v 8b, even though those effects (death by the sword, famine, plague, and wild animals) appear to be the work of the fourth cavalier and his companion (Death and Hades). Rev 6:1–8 contains five occurrences of the author’s typical audition word, ἤκουσα, ‘I heard,’ in vv 1b, 3b, 5a, 6a, 7 and three occurrences of one of his typical vision phrases, καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ, ‘I saw, and behold,’ in vv 2a, 5b, 8a. Both of these stereotypical expressions do not serve to introduce either a new audition or vision; rather they function to call attention to a new or significant feature or action within a continuing vision narrative audition or vision (5:2, 6, 11; 6:2, 5, 8, 12; 7:2; 9:1; 16:13; 17:3, 6; cf. Acts

course, each of the four scenes are packed full of symbolical meaning as well as collectively present a powerful message to the seven churches of Asia at the end of the first Christian century. The commonalities and distinctives at the more detailed level will be explored in the exegesis below.

This repetitive pattern serves to build toward a climax in the fourth scene which somewhat captures the essence of the previous three scenes with its greater detail.

Additionally, one should note the 4 + 3 pattern in the series of seals, followed by a similar pattern with the seven trumpets (8:2-9:21; 11:15-18). Clearly the message of this repeated cycle is one of promise of divine wrath (1st 4) and of divine protection (2nd 3) for His people.

Exegesis of the Text:

Quite naturally then, the exegesis of the text will follow the natural fourfold division of the text as charted out above in the Block Diagram.

A. Seal One: white horse, vv. 1-2

6.1 Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὸ ἀρνίον μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἐπτὰ σφραγίδων, καὶ ἤκουσα ἐνὸς ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγοντος ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς· ἔρχου. 2 καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ ἵππος λευκός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἔχων τόξον καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στέφανος καὶ ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ.

6.1 Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, “Come!” 2 I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.

The beginning Καὶ εἶδον, and I saw, links this section of 6:1-8:1 back to 5:1-14 which sets up the series of opening of the seals in chapters six and seven. The formula Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε, and I saw when, (vv. 1, 12) or the abbreviated Καὶ ὅτε, and when, (vv. 3, 5, 7, 9) will 11:6; Dan 12:5; Ezek 37:8; 44:4; see Comment on 5:1). Despite the stereotypical structure of vv 1–8, variation is introduced in a number of ways. First, the phrase καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ, ‘I saw, and behold,’ is unexpectedly missing from v 4a, and in its place is the single verb ἐξῆλθεν, ‘he rode out.’ Second, only the first cavalier is said to ἐξῆλθεν, ‘ride away,’ to execute his task (v 2b), whereas the text is silent about whether the following three cavaliers actually executed their tasks. Third, the aorist passive verb ἐδόθη, ‘It was given,’ a circumlocution for divine activity or authorization, is used of the first, second, and fourth cavaliers (vv 2b, 4b, 4c, 8c) but not of the third. Fourth, the pericope dealing with the third cavalier is further distinguished by the insertion of a divine commission (v 6), which can only be attributed to God himself since it originates from the midst of the four cherubim.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 389.

introduce each of the six seals presented in chapter six.¹⁴ Thus Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε introduces the first and the sixth seals, while Καὶ ὅτε introduces seals two through five. The Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε then serves to bind together the six seals in something of a unit, with Καὶ ὅτε marking sub-divisions inside the six seals.

Interesting background echoes of the four horses are found in several texts in the ancient world. Most importantly stands Zech. 1:7-11 and 6:1-8 in the background as a probably source for John's imagery:

Zech. 1:7-11. 7 Τῆ τετράδι καὶ εἰκάδι τῶ ἐνδεκάτῳ μηνί — οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μὴν Σαβατ — ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ ἔτει ἐπὶ Δαρειοῦ ἐγένετο λόγος κυρίου πρὸς Ζαχαριαν τὸν τοῦ Βαραχίου υἱὸν Αἰδδῶ τὸν προφήτην λέγων† 8 Ἐώρακα τὴν νύκτα καὶ ἰδοὺ **ἄνθρωπος ἐπιβεβηκὼς ἐπὶ ἵππον πυρρόν**, καὶ οὗτος εἰστήκει ἀνά μέσον τῶν δύο ὁρέων τῶν κατασκίων, καὶ **ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ ἵπποι πυρροὶ καὶ ψαροὶ καὶ ποικίλοι καὶ λευκοί.**† 9 καὶ εἶπα Τί οὗτοι, κύριε; καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν ἐν ἐμοί Ἐγὼ δεῖξω σοι τί ἐστὶν ταῦτα.† 10 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἐφεστηκὼς ἀνά μέσον τῶν ὁρέων καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με Οὗτοί εἰσιν οὓς ἐξαπέσταλκεν κύριος τοῦ περιδεῦσαι τὴν γῆν.† 11 καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν τῷ ἀγγέλῳ κυρίου τῷ ἐφεστῶτι ἀνά μέσον τῶν ὁρέων καὶ εἶπον Περιδεύκαμεν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἰδοὺ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ κατοικεῖται καὶ ἡσυχάζει.†

7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo; and Zechariah said, 8 In the night I saw **a man riding on a red horse!** He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen; and **behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.** 9 Then I said, “What are these, my lord?” The angel who talked with me said to me, “I will show you what they are.” 10 So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, “They are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth.” 11 Then they spoke to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees,

Zech. 6:1-8. 6.1 Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα καὶ ἦρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ τέσσαρα ἄρματα ἐκπορευόμενα ἐκ μέσου δύο ὁρέων, καὶ τὰ ὄρη ἦν ὄρη χαλκῶ.† **2 ἐν τῷ ἄρματι τῷ πρώτῳ ἵπποι πυρροί, καὶ ἐν τῷ ἄρματι τῷ δευτέρῳ ἵπποι μέλανες,† 3 καὶ ἐν τῷ ἄρματι τῷ τρίτῳ ἵπποι λευκοί, καὶ ἐν τῷ ἄρματι τῷ τετάρτῳ ἵπποι ποικίλοι ψαροί.**† 4 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη καὶ εἶπα πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον τὸν λαλοῦντα ἐν ἐμοί Τί ἐστὶν ταῦτα, κύριε;† 5 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν ἐν ἐμοί καὶ εἶπεν Ταῦτά ἐστιν οἱ τέσσαρες ἄνεμοι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἐκπορεύονται

¹⁴A modification of Καὶ ὅτε will introduce the seventh seal, Καὶ ὅταν, in 8:1. In the interlude of chapter seven the introductory formulas will be Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον (v. 1, 9) with Καὶ ἤκουσα also added in (v. 9).

παραστῆναι τῷ κυρίῳ πάσης τῆς γῆς.† 6 ἐν ᾧ ἦσαν οἱ ἵπποι οἱ μέλανες, ἐξεπορεύοντο ἐπὶ γῆν βορρᾶ, καὶ οἱ λευκοὶ ἐξεπορεύοντο κατόπισθεν αὐτῶν, καὶ οἱ ποικίλοι ἐξεπορεύοντο ἐπὶ γῆν νότου,† 7 καὶ οἱ ψαροὶ ἐξεπορεύοντο καὶ ἐπέβλεπον τοῦ πορεύεσθαι τοῦ περιδεῦσαι τὴν γῆν. καὶ εἶπεν Πορεύεσθε καὶ περιδεύσατε τὴν γῆν· καὶ περιώδευσαν τὴν γῆν.† 8 καὶ ἀνεβόησεν καὶ ἐλάλησεν πρὸς με λέγων Ἰδοὺ οἱ ἐκπορευόμενοι ἐπὶ γῆν βορρᾶ ἀνέπασαν τὸν θυμὸν μου ἐν γῆ βορρᾶ.†

6.1 And again I looked up and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains — mountains of bronze. **2 The first chariot had red horses, the second chariot black horses, 3 the third chariot white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled gray horses.** 4 Then I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” 5 The angel answered me, “These are the four spirits of heaven going out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. 6 The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go toward the west country, and the dappled ones go toward the south country.” 7 When the steeds came out, they were impatient to get off and patrol the earth. And he said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth. 8 Then he cried out to me, “Lo, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country.”¹⁵

In chapter one the four horsemen had the task of patrolling the earth to determine the condition of the people (v. 10). In their report back to God, they indicated that “the whole earth remains at peace” (v. 11). In the following dialogue between the Lord and the angel of the Lord (vv. 12-18a), the Lord promises to punish the nations while protecting His people in Jerusalem. Subsequent visions underscore this same theme of God's wrath on non-Israelites and His protection for His people. For John, this backdrop provides the interpretive clue to his vision of the four horsemen in his vision.

Chapter six contains vision eight in Zechariah's series that centers on four chariots with horses of four different colors.¹⁶ Their task is “Go, patrol the earth” (v.

¹⁵“The four cavaliers described in Rev 6:1–8 are in part allusions to Zech 1:7–11; 6:1–8. The four chariots drawn by horses in Zech 6:1–8 are identified with the four winds (v 5), though nothing is said about the four directions. The four cavaliers of Zech 1:8 ride red, dappled gray, sorrel, and white horses, while the horses that draw the four chariots in Zech 6:1–3 are red, black, white, and dappled gray, and the four horses of Rev 6:1–8 are white, red, black, and pale (gray or yellowish green).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 390.]

¹⁶“The form of this eighth vision account is similar to the previous ones (except the fourth). The prophet lifts his eyes and sees four chariots going out between two brass mountains. The four chariots are distinguished by the different colors of horses hitched

7). The four colors of the horses here roughly match those in John's vision.¹⁷ For the exiled Israelites in Babylon, the prophet's message was one of both hope and promise: hope for a return to Jerusalem and promise of divine judgment on the nations who overran Israel, as is celebrated in the subsequent and final vision in vv. 9-15.

But also in later Christian writings Dio Chrysostom uses John's four horsemen in an intriguing manner in comparing the four horsemen of Revelation to the chariot of the Greek god Zeus, whose chariot was supposedly pulled by four horses of different colors.¹⁸ This p-

to each chariot. Nothing is said at this point about directions. The prophet asks what these four chariots with their horses mean. The interpreting angel replies that they represent the four winds or spirits of heaven who are going out from a meeting of the heavenly council. The black horses are to go toward the land of the north (Babylon) with the white horses following them, and the dappled horses are to go to the land of the south. The strong (all the horses) were ready and anxious to begin their missions of patrolling the earth (v 7). Then they were given the signal to start their journeys. Again one cried to the prophet, 'See the horses going to the north country have established the rule of God in the power center of the world.' The setting of this vision obviously is the heavenly council on the cosmic mountain. It seems to occur at sunrise. The bronze mountains gleamed in the morning light as a symbol of hope and a new day." [Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 212–213.]

¹⁷W. H. McHardy argues that originally only four words were in the list (אדם, שרק, לבן, שחר). He believes that these words were not written fully at first but were indicated by their initials or by the first letter. Through much copying the initials were misunderstood and two extra words (ברד from Gen 31:10, 12, and אמן confused with אדם) crept into the text. If this theory is true then the four original colors were אדם "red," שרק "sorrel" (or ירק "green"), לבן "white" and שחר "black." Two other Scripture passages seem to support this hypothesis. The prophet Joel compares a plague of locusts to horses (2:4) and the book of Revelation remarks that their flight is similar to the noise of the sound of chariots and of many horses rushing to war. Again the book of Revelation speaks about four horses — white, red, black, and pale (gray or greenish yellow). S. R. Driver quotes an Arab saying in a note on the locusts in the book of Joel, 'The Arabs say that there are different kinds of locusts, yellow, white, red, and black' (Driver, *Joel and Amos*, 88 n. 1)." [Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 214.]

18 "An interesting parallel is found in Dio Chrysostom Or 36.42–53 (LCL tr.), who wants to validate the Stoic view of the conflagration of the cosmos by showing how it is compatible with a myth of the magi, who speak of the perfect charioteer Zeus, whose chariot is pulled by four heavenly horses: (1) The first is sacred to Zeus, a 'winged creature, brilliant in colour with the brilliance of the purest flame.' This horse once caused a fiery blast to scorch the earth. This first horse also deserved victory and a crown (τὴν νίκην καὶ τὸν στέφανον; see Rev 6:2, where the rider of the first horse is given a crown [στέφανος] and rides out 'conquering and to conquer [νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ]'). (2) The second is Hera's horse, which is a bit slower and is black. This horse once caused a flood on earth. (3) The third, still slower, is sacred to Poseidon and once caused a fountain to spring forth by pawing the earth with its hoof.

gan image stressed the wrath of Zeus and the related Greek gods. John's non-Christian readers would have readily understood the image of divine wrath out of this background image of Zeus that had existed for several centuries in sculptured images in most of the temples dedicate to him across Asia.

1) Lamb opens one of the seals: Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὸ ἀρνίον μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ σφραγίδων, **And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals.**

The introductory phrase Καὶ εἶδον, **and I saw**, contains no direct object defining what John saw. This bothered several manuscript copyists centuries later (2053. 2351 M^k vg) and so the temporal conjunction ὅτε, **when**, was changed to ὅτι, **that**, in order to smooth out the grammar construction. But the Greek Aorist verb εἶδον from ὁράω is used intransitively without a direct object on occasion, even though overwhelmingly it is used as a transitive verb requiring a direct object (e.g., the majority of many uses in Revelation).¹⁹

As John watched the action of the temporal dependent clause took place: ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὸ ἀρνίον μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ σφραγίδων, **when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals.** This temporal clause will be repeated in the same essential form three more times (vv. 3, 5, 7), although without re-stating the subject τὸ ἀρνίον, **the Lamb.**²⁰ What is depicted here is Christ as the Lamb untying the string bound together by the seal so that the scroll can be unrolled down to the next seal where it stops until that seal is untied.²¹ One should remember the image: a lamb untying the strings attached to a seal with His hooves! Obviously here is an apocalyptic **visionary image at work.**²²

(4) The fourth, named after Hestia, is firm and immovable. This entire scheme is clearly astrological (Boll, *Offenbarung*, 78–97; Betz, *Lukian von Samosata*, 97–98 n. 6)" [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 390.]

¹⁹Notice the incorrect translation of the NRSV "I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals" that assumes ὅτι rather than ὅτε. Better is the ESV: "I watched when the Lamb opened one."

²⁰The same pattern prevails for the remaining three seals of the series of seven in 6:9, 12 and 8:1. Stylistically no need existed to repeat the subject after the initial formula expression in 6:1.

²¹"The main action of the book of Revelation begins with this vision. The remainder of Revelation is in reality an explanation of the seals of the little book of destiny. Back of all history is God in Christ; in this book we see the hand of Christ opening the sealed book of God's dealings with men. The seal was a sign of ownership. Only an official representative could open one's seal. Here Christ is God's official representative, and he is qualified to open the seals." [Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb: An Interpretation of Revelation*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), 138–139.]

²²"Since it is obviously very difficult to imagine a lamb opening a sealed scroll, It is possible that the figure of the Lamb has subsequently been superimposed on an originally anthropomorphic figure." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word

Of course, the reference to τὸ ἀρνίον, the Lamb, here goes back to τὸ ἀρνίον in 5:13, 12, 8, 6 in the introductory scene of chapter five. Deemed worthy to open the scroll, now He begins to do it.

Although the opening of the four seals could imply sequential occurrence of each disaster, the greater likelihood is that they occur simultaneously. Several factors point this direction:²³ 1) Summary nature of the fourth seal; 2) parallels to Ezek. 14:12-13; Zech. 6:5-8, and Synoptic Gospels little apocalypses; 3) the martyred saints have suffered from all four trials. The depiction of them sequentially is necessary in written presentation, but the intent of John is to paint a holistic picture of divine judgment upon the earth.

The first group of four seals in the 4 + 3 pattern is built around the four living creatures, or cherubim, who summons the horsemen to appear out of the scroll as it is unfolded in each sequence. A similar pattern of 4 + 3 will be repeated with the seven trumpets in 8:2-9:21; 11:15-18.

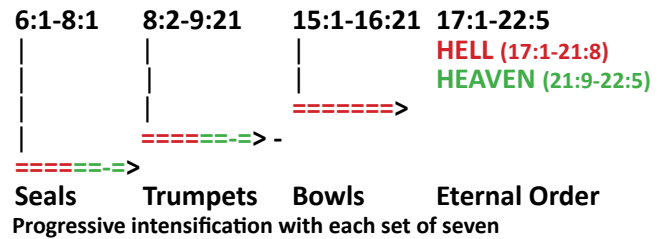
The initial numbering of the first seal is different from the remainder: μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ σφραγίδων, one of the seven seals, versus τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν δευτέραν, the second seal (v. 3); τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τρίτην, the third seal (v. 5); τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην, the fourth seal (v. 7); τὴν πέμπτην σφραγίδα, the fifth seal (v. 9); τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἕκτην, the sixth seal (v. 12); τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἑβδόμη, the seventh seal (8:1). This seems to signal a foundational role for the first horseman whose assigned task is stated in very general terms while the other three have more specifically defined missions that fall under the broad umbrella concept of conquering assigned to the first horseman.

The number seven is used repeatedly as a structuring device reflecting the complete plan of God from beginning to end. Three series of sevens, i.e., a *heptad*, surface in Revelation: seven seals (6:1-8:1); sev-

Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 392.]

²³“The visionary sequence of the four seals being opened could represent the sequential occurrence of each disaster, one after another.² But more probably the disasters are simultaneous. This is suggested in that (1) the fourth seal summarizes the prior three (see below on 6:8); (2) the models of Ezek. 14:12-13; Zech. 6:5-8; and the Synoptic eschatological discourse, on which Rev. 6:1-8 is based, portray events of tribulation occurring simultaneously (see further below); indeed, the Synoptic parallels, though fairly uniform, even have different sequences of the trials from Rev. 6:1-11; (3) the glorified saints in Rev. 6:9-11 appear to have suffered under all four trials portrayed in the seals. Nevertheless, a logical pattern repeatable throughout the age is discernible: conquest (the first rider), together with civil unrest (especially for persecuted Christians — the second rider), leads to famine (the third rider) and death (the fourth rider).⁴⁷ [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 370-371.

en trumpets (8:2-11:21); and seven bowls (15:1-16:21). The following chart lays out the literary and theological strategy of John:



The cycles build toward a climax with the seventh one opening the way to the next series. The ultimate climax comes then in 17:1-21:8 with the coming of Christ in conquest. The theological point is to affirm that central to the divine plan for the ages of human history is the coming of the Son of Man at the end of history in order to usher in the new age of eternity. The twin themes of **divine wrath on human sinfulness** (the 4 of the 4 + 3 structure) and **the divine protection of His people** (the 3 of the 4 + 3 structure) underscore how God is working in human history to move it toward this great climactic event at the end.²⁴ That God always judges sin is the fundamental point of the first theme, and that He will always deliver His people that of the second theme. Each of these themes -- judgment and deliverance -- builds climactically in each of the three series of seven toward their final expression at the end of human history. Thus the final events will focus on the great day of God's wrath poured out on evil and evil people in Hell, along side the marvelous final deliverance of His

²⁴“While the metaphor of the breaking open of a series of seven seals is unique to Revelation, there is some late evidence for a series of seven used to narrate the events that will occur just before the inauguration of the eschaton. The first text is b. Sanh. 97a (tr. Epstein, *Babylonian Talmud*):

Our Rabbis taught: In the seven year cycle at the end of which the son of David will come—in the first year, this verse will be fulfilled: And I will cause it to rain upon one city and cause it not to rain upon another city [Amos 4:7]; in the second, the arrows of hunger will be sent forth; in the third, a great famine, in the course of which men, women, and children, pious men and saints will die, and the Torah will be forgotten by its students; in the fourth, partial plenty; in the fifth, great plenty, when men will eat, drink and rejoice, and the Torah will return to its disciples; in the sixth, [Heavenly] sounds; in the seventh, wars; and at the conclusion of the septennate the son of David will come.

The last three of these years are also mentioned in b. Meg. 17b (tr. Epstein, *Babylonian Talmud*):

What was their reason for mentioning redemption in the seventh blessing? Raba replied: Because they [Israel] are destined to be redeemed in the seventh year [of the coming of the Messiah], therefore the mention of redemption was placed in the seventh blessing. But a Master has said, “in the sixth year will be thunderings, in the seventh wars, at the end of the seventh the son of David will come”? War is also the beginning of redemption.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 392.]

people in Christ being ushered into Heaven for eternity. The two ‘interludes’ between the sixth and seventh items (seals: 7:1-17; trumpets: 10:1-11:13) become parenthetical amplifications on the deliverance of God of His people.²⁵ The Lamb plays a key role in both the rendering of judgment and in delivering God’s people.

Thus John opens the drama of human history with this initial declaration of divine wrath accompanied by God taking complete control over human history. With the opening of the scroll we are privileged to discover with profound detail the eternal plan of God for His creation stained deeply by human sinfulness and for the people He has redeemed through His Son Christ the Lamb.

What a marvelous declaration to a people who are being persecuted for their faith surrender to Christ the LAMB OF GOD. John’s initial readers found enormous comfort in this powerful affirmation of the righteousness of God in both punishing sin and delivering those committed to Him. So can we still today!

2) First Living Creature cries out: καὶ ἤκουσα ἑνὸς ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγοντος ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς· ἔρχου, and I heard one from among the four living creatures saying as with a great voice, “Come!”

John’s participation in the scene is now defined as καὶ ἤκουσα, and I heard. This second of the two levels of John’s involvement in the vision -- εἶδον, I saw, and ἤκουσα, I heard -- resumes here and becomes a part of the first four seals: 6:1-7. The sounds that he hears are loud and thunderous: ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς, as a voice of thunder (v. 3). The voice speaking in seals two through four are introduced simply with λέγοντος (vv. 3, 5, 7), but should be understood in the manner of the first voice in v. 1.

The four ‘voices’ are those of the four living creatures and they all issue the same command to each of the four horsemen: ἔρχου. This present tense imperative verb from ἔρχομαι carries both perspectives of ‘coming’ and ‘going.’ The verbal action of each of the four horsemen is defined as ἐξῆλθεν, he came out of, carries the idea of coming out of the scroll at the command of each living creature. But the nature of ἔρχομαι behind ἐξῆλθεν also implies departing from heaven to earth in order to carry out his divine mission -- something that is confirmed explicitly by the specific commands that are given (cf. vv. 4, 6, 8).

The role of the four living creatures (τέσσαρα ζῶα) or cherubim in the unfolding drama is significant. The Lamb opens the scroll, but the cherubim give a com-

²⁵The third ‘interlude’ in 12:1-14:20 comes after the seventh trumpet and prior to the seven bowls with a uniform theme on judgment. This lengthy third interlude incorporates the twin themes of judgment (12:1-13:18) and deliverance (14:1-20).

mand to the horsemen each to take action. These creatures both represent God and also God’s creation. We first encountered them in the initial phase of this part two of John’s vision in 4:6b-9.²⁶ Respectively they are described as having the form²⁷ of a lion, an ox, a human (face), and an eagle. Their heads are full of eyes front and back. Attached to each body are three pairs of wings (v. 8). Their key role is defined as καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες, and they cease not having days and nights chanting. Then in the Lamb scene (chap. 5) they join the elders and the angels in chanting praises to the Lamb. (cf. vv. 8-9, 14). In chapters six their role is to call forth the four horsemen out of the unrolled scroll at each seal opening with the uniform command ἔρχου, come!. This command initiates the divinely ordered mission for each of the horsemen. Thus in a limited sense, God’s own creation activates the purging of its human based corruption. At minimum, it clearly cooperates with God in this purging. This echoes Paul’s picturesque image of creating longing for divine purging in Rom. 8:19-23.²⁸

²⁶Rev. 4:6b-9. Καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου τέσσαρα ζῶα γέμοντα ὀφθαλμῶν ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν. 7 καὶ τὸ ζῶον τὸ πρῶτον ὅμοιον λέοντι καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ζῶον ὅμοιον μόσχῳ καὶ τὸ τρίτον ζῶον ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ζῶον ὅμοιον ἀετῶ πετομένῳ. 8 καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα, ἐν καθ’ ἑν αὐτῶν ἔχων ἀνά πτέρυγας ἕξ, κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν, καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες· ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος.

9 Καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν τὰ ζῶα δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, 6b. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 7 the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever,

²⁷The comparison of the first, second, and fourth ζῶον is made with ὅμοιον which suggests the shape of either the head or of the entire body. But the third creature is specifically described as ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου, having the face of a man. This would tend to favor the idea that the body shape of all four creatures is essentially the same, and that it is only the head that differs in shape.

²⁸Rom. 8:19-23. 19 ἡ γὰρ ἀποκαταδοκία τῆς κτίσεως τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἰῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται. 20 τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἑκούσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι 21 ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ. 22 οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πάντα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν· 23 οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν.

The voice of the first of the living creatures, the lion, roars out the command to come: λέγοντος ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς, *saying as a sound of thunder*. The translation dilemma with φωνή is its dual connection to βροντῆς and to the ζῶον who is ὅμοιον λέοντι, *like a lion* (4:7). Living creatures have a φωνή, *voice*, and they also make a φωνή, *sound*. But thunder only makes a φωνή, *sound*. In the Greek φωνή captures both ideas with one word, but no such equivalent word exists in English. But a φωνή βροντῆς, *sound of thunder*, stands as a frequent comparison to humans speaking very loudly in ancient Greek literature, and especially of the gods.

The sound of thunder linked to the speaking of a heavenly figure surfaces in 6:1 and 14:2, but the sound of peals of thunder is frequently heard by John in his vision of heaven: 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18. And then there are the strange ‘seven thunders’ (αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταί): 10:3-4.²⁹ Thus out of the OT tradition, βροντή (from βρέμω meaning to roar) is closely linked to heaven and God.³⁰ Thus the speaking of this living creature was thunderously loud and therefore containing ultimate authority from God.

3) *White horse emerges from the scroll:*

καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ ἵππος λευκός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἔχων τόξον καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στέφανος καὶ ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ. *And I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out*

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

²⁹**Rev. 10:3-4.** 3 καὶ ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ὡς περ λέων μυκᾶται. καὶ ὅτε ἔκραξεν, ἐλάλησαν αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν φωνάς. 4 καὶ ὅτε ἐλάλησαν αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταί, ἤμελλον γράφειν, καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λέγουσαν· σφράγισον ἃ ἐλάλησαν αἱ ἑπτὰ βρονταί, καὶ μὴ αὐτὰ γράψῃς.

3 he gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded. 4 And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.”

³⁰“The phrase ‘like the sound of thunder’ occurs only here in connection with the summoning of the first cavalier. Thunder is used elsewhere in Revelation as a metaphor to characterize an extremely loud voice in 14:2; 19:6 (cf. 2 Apoc. Bar. 11:3; 14:1-2). God’s voice is frequently compared with the sound of thunder (2 Sam 22:14; Job 37:2-5; Pss 18:13; 29:3-9; Isa 29:6; 30:30-31; Jer 25:30; Amos 1:2), a simile perhaps derived from the theophanic imagery of the Sinai tradition.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 393.]



conquering and to conquer.

At the command of the first living creature, out of the scroll emerges a white horse with a rider. Quite intriguing for the ancient world, no one reads any text contained in the unrolled scroll. Whether or not it contained any is not known. Such would have been conceivable only for apocalyptic visionary experience; ordinary religious experience would not have been so oriented.

The initial signaling of this very unusual dynamic comes with the first words καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ, *and I saw and behold....* It functions as a literary device of emphasis drawing special attention to what follows the καὶ ἰδοῦ. This phrase is omitted in the second seal pericope, but repeated in the third and fourth seal texts.³¹ And it stresses that John saw an image coming out of the scroll, rather than reading a text description of the image. True to the visionary nature of his experience, he saw rather than read.

Although colored horses are a part of the background imagery in Zechariah 1 and 6, not explanation of the symbolism of the colors are provided. But here the symbolism is implicit in the definition of mission described in each of the first four seals. Thus the white horse, as typically the case in military circles in the an-

³¹Additionally, the phrase καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ surfaces in 4:1; 7:9; 14:1, 14. Additionally in codex Sinaitus [Σ] it is added at 6:4 as well in order to complete the series of four seals.

cient world, symbolized victory and conquest.³²

The image of conquest suggested by the white horse has raised questions about the identity of the rider. The situation is made more complex with the almost identical phraseology being reproduced in Rev. 19:11, where the rider is clearly identified as Christ.³³ But clearly a



Feared Parthian Cavalryman

³²“In *Metam.* 8.25–36, Ovid depicts the legendary Minos as mounted on a white horse and as carrying a bow as well as a spear (Neuer Wettstein, ad. loc.)” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 393.]

³³“The phrase καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος λευκὸς καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ αὐτόν, literally ‘and behold, a white horse and the one seated on it,’ is repeated verbatim in 19:11, a fact that suggests some kind of literary correlation between the two passages, perhaps even the identity of the two cavaliers. The white horse is an allusion based on the team of white horses in the vision of Zech 6:3. It is possible to interpret the figure of the cavalier in either a positive or a negative manner, though the fact that the second, third, and fourth seals are negative makes it difficult to maintain that the first seal is positive. (1) Positive interpretations. (a) Christ, the Messiah, or the Divine Warrior. Since the cavalier on the white horse in 19:11–16 is called ‘the Word of God’ and represents the Messiah, interpreters beginning with Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 4.21.3) have understood the cavalier in 6:2 as Christ (Methodius *Symp.* 8.7, quoted by Andreas Comm. in Apoc. 6:2; Schmid, *Studien* 1/1:60; Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 181–92; Bachmann, *Bib.* 67 [1986] 240–75; Hodges, *BSac* 119 [1962] 324–34; Heil, *Bib.* 74 [1993] 223). The appearance of the white horse in 19:11–16 might suggest that the cavalier here in 6:2, like the cavalier there, is the Messiah.

“Despite the verbal similarity between 6:2 and 19:12, however, the two cavaliers have actually very little in common: though both have white mounts, the cavalier in 6:2 carries a bow and wears a wreath (στέφανος) of victory, while the cavalier in 19:11–16 has a sharp two-edged sword in his mouth and wears many diadems (διαδήματα), symbols of sovereignty (Swete, 86). The first cavalier should not be identified with the Messiah of 19:11–16 since it is obviously the Lamb himself who is opening the seals, and it is therefore unlikely that the Lamb is also the cavalier summoned by the breaking of the first seal (see Zahn, 2:352–53). Further, the Messiah is not expected to appear before the Messianic woes are complete (Charles, 1:164). (b) The victorious progress of the Gospel. Since there appear to be insuperable obstacles in identifying Christ as the first cavalier, a number of interpreters have suggested that the conquering activity of the cavalier can represent the triumph of the Gospel (Zahn, 2:352–53; J. Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 60–62; Allo, 87–88). In the Christian adaptation of Jewish apocalyptic, the proclamation of the gospel occupies a position of some

strong connection exists between this first horseman and the next four, who are obviously negative images.³⁴ Thus far more natural to the text is to see this first rider in the same negative role as the next four.

Historically standing in the background at the end of the first century Asia was the vivid recollection of the defeat of the Roman military by the Parthians from Babylonia in 62 AD.³⁵ The Parthians were the only military in the ancient world to use mounted cavalry men using bows in military battles and they were greatly feared. Although the Romans successfully conquered almost every group they went up against, they never were successful against the Parthians in the eastern fertile crescent region.³⁶ Thus the mounted cavalryman with

importance in the events of the last days; according to Mark 13:10 (Matt 24:14; Luke 21:12), ‘the gospel must first be preached to all nations.’ Oecumenius combines the two preceding views by claiming that the white horse represents the gospel and Christ is the cavalier (Comm. in Apoc. 6:2; Hoskier, Oecumenius, 84). (c) A general argument for interpreting the four horsemen in a positive way is the fact that the image of the celestial cavalier is widely understood in the Greco-Roman world as a savior who delivers people from various types of trouble, e.g., the Dioscuri, Heron the Thracian cavalier god, Horus, or Mithras (see Johnston, CP 87 [1992] 307–16). (2) Negative interpretations. (a) Military conquest (Swete, 86; Mounce, 154; Roloff, 80–81) or, more specifically, a Parthian invasion (Wettstein, *NT Graecum*; Bousset [1906] 265–66; Ramsay, *Letters*, 58; Swete, 86; Charles, 1:164 [a secondary meaning overlaid on the text by the author]; Lohse, 47; Boring, 122; Metzger, *Code*, 58). (b) The Antichrist or false Messiahs. This view is usually based on the supposition that the sequence of eschatological events in the eschatological discourse (Mark 13 and par.) is somehow being replicated in Rev 6:1–17. Since the first theme in Mark 13:5–6 is the warning that many will attempt to lead Christians astray, the first cavalier must be understood in that light (R. W. Cowley, *Apocalypse*, 229; Rissi, *Zeit*, 89–94; id., *Int* 18 [1964] 407–18; Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 191). However, there are no convincing arguments for accepting this identification. (c) Gunkel suggested that the first cavalier represents the sun god Mithras (*Verständnis*, 53–54 n. 6), but this is extremely speculative since it is only one of several uses of the divine cavalier image (see Johnston, CP 87 [1992] 307–16).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 393–394.]

³⁴As will become obvious in the exegesis of the second through fourth horsemen, in a very real sense this first horseman stands as the commanding ‘general’ over the other three. Their assignments grow out of his broadly defined assignment of conquering. The nature of the description of the first horseman is assumed in abbreviated form for those that follow.

³⁵Clearly the Parthians are in view in 9:14 and 16:12.

³⁶“The image of the archer on the white horse, who is ‘crowned’ and goes forth to ‘conquer,’ is intended to evoke in the hearer-readers’ minds a specific, dreaded threat. Just as ‘men wearing green berets flying in Cobra helicopters’ evokes a specific image in the twentieth century, so the combination of white horse and mounted archer called up only one picture in the imagination of the first-century reader — the dreaded Parthians. They were the only mounted archers in the first century; white horses were

a bow in hand struck fear in the hearts of those living in the eastern Roman empire. The white horse normally was ridden by the commanding general of this regiment of soldiers.³⁷ This military tradition provided John a significant background against which to paint this first horseman as a conquering figure whose heaven based power would be victorious without questioning.

Having a τόξον, bow, in his hand is symbolically significant.³⁸ Archers played an important roll in most militarys in the ancient world, except for the Romans. The Parthians were the only ones with mounted archers, however. Even in the OT tradition bows and arrows could represent divine punishment upon people, especially covenant Israel, as Deut. 32:23-25 suggests

their trademark. Parthia was on the eastern border of the empire, and was never subdued by the Romans. In the Roman mind they represented the edges of civilization, a different kind of enemy, somewhat like the Yellow Peril in the consciousness of many western Europeans and Americans. The defeat of the Roman armies in the Tigris valley by the Parthian general Vologeses in 62 was still remembered in John's time. John will use this potent image again (9:13-16; 16:12).” [M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 122.]

³⁷“The white remains, and this naturally belongs to the horse on which triumphant war is seated. Thus Xerxes rode on white Nisaeon horses (Herod. vii. 40; Philostr. Vit. Apoll. i. 30), and Mardonius, one of his chief generals, rode on a white horse (Herod. ix. 63). White was the colour of victory: cf. Virg. Aen. iii. 537, ‘Quatuor hic, primum omen, equos in gramine vidi Tondentes campum late candore nivali.’ Here Servius notes: ‘candore nivali. Hoc ad victoriae omen pertinet.’ According to Dio Cassius, H.R. xliiii. 14 (quoted by Swete), the four horses which drew the car in Julius Caesar’s triumph were white: τὰ ἐπινίκια τὰ προεφηφισμένα ἐπὶ τε λευκῶν ἵππων.” [R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 162.]

³⁸“The cavalier carries a bow (arrows are not mentioned, though certainly implied). For bow and arrows as proverbial instruments of death along with the sword and asps, see T. Abr. [Rec. B] 14:4. Archers were an important offensive force in ancient armies (Isa 21:17; Jer 50:29; 51:3). The bow was not, however, a Roman weapon but one widely used in Greece, Anatolia, and the Near East, especially Parthia (Ramsay, *Letters*, 58). The bow (together with arrows) is used in the OT as a symbol for divine chastisement (Deut 32:42; Isa 34:6; Hab 3:9; Lam 3:12-13; Ps. 7:13-14). According to Deut 32:23-25 (perhaps reworked in Ezek 5:16-17), the arrows of the Lord cause the plagues of famine, plague, wild animals, and the sword. That these four plagues are mentioned specifically in v 8 suggests that they are the ‘arrows’ unleashed by the first cavalier. However, that the bow alone is mentioned here militates against the full relevance of these parallels. The close association of the bow with Apollo has led some interpreters to regard the bow either as a symbol of the majesty of Apollo, used here to symbolize the majesty of Christ (Bachmann, Bib. 67 [1986] 263-64), or as a symbol for Apollo himself (Kerkeslager, JBL 112 [1993] 118-21), whose arrows can bring death.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 394.]

and as it is being reworked in Ezek. 5:16-17 in visionary terms. Thus the horseman’s possession of a bow reflects his intention to inflict death upon his enemies on earth.

This supra human rider καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στέφανος καὶ ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ, and there was given to him a crown and he went out conquering and in order to conquer. Interestingly being given³⁹ a στέφανος as he emerges from the scroll clearly distinguishes him from the Romans who by law and tradition forbade any ruler in the empire from wearing a crown.⁴⁰ Although Christ sitting on a white horse in 19:11-13 has a crown, it is not a στέφανος, but a diadem style crown: καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά, and upon his head were many diadems. The στέφανος, made of olive branches and leaves, was in the ancient world a symbol of victory; but the διάδημα was a symbol of sovereignty and power. The divine granting of the στέφανος combined with the commissioning to conquer assured the rider of success in his infliction of defeat on his enemies.

His objective is stated as καὶ ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ, and he went out conquering and in order to conquer. To be sure the grammar construction here is very ‘un-Greek’ and likely reflects a Hebrew thought pattern brought over into Greek.⁴¹ The emphasis is strong-

³⁹“This is the first occurrence of the aorist passive ἐδόθη, a passivum divinum, ‘passive of divine activity,’ used twenty-two times in Revelation (the third plural ἐδόθησαν occurs twice in 8:2; 12:14; on the passivum divinum, see Comment on 9:3). The use of the divine passive does not of itself appear to indicate the positive or negative aspects of divine enablement envisaged (Bachmann, Bib. 67 [1986] 245). The verb ἐδόθη is used five times in vv 1-8, referring to a divine commission or divine enablement bestowed on all the cavaliers with the exception of the third (vv 5-6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 394-395.]

⁴⁰“Roman rulers never wore a crown. When the Tarquins were driven out about 500 B.C., a precedent was set against monarchical rule. There was a traditional hatred for the crown which suggested it; many rulers had been killed because they longed to be king. In contrast to this, coins of Persia have been found showing a horseman with bow in hand and a crown on his head.” [Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb: An Interpretation of Revelation*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), 140.]

⁴¹“The phrase νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ, literally ‘conquering that he might conquer,’ is very obscure Greek and syntactically problematic. S. Thompson has proposed that this construction reflects the use of the Hebrew verb + cognate infinitive absolute, which he suggests should be emended to ἐξῆλθεν ἵνα νικῶν καὶ νικήσῃ, ‘he departed, in order that he might thoroughly conquer,’ the usual way in which the LXX translates the Hebrew verb + cognate infinitive absolute, i.e., with a Greek verb + cognate participle (Apocalypse, 80-81). Krause (“Participle,” 202-4) has suggested that νικῶν is a nominative and should be linked with the subject of the verb (see Note 2.d.*), while the connecting καὶ can be construed as introducing a heightened insertion (BAGD, s.v. καὶ, II.2), resulting in the translation ‘the conquering one left to conquer even more.’ The

ly upon inflicting massive warfare on the earth, out of which will come the sword, famine, and plagues of the subsequent horsemen. Being granted a crown of victory prior to doing his mission of warfare represents the guaranteed victory due to divine commissioning.

What then shall we make of this horseman on the white horse? Clearly he represents the destructiveness of warfare, but when and how? Many interpreters see this purely historical as a prediction of the eventual demise of the Roman empire. That the horseman represented this to the first century readers in the seven churches is clear. But to limit the meaning to just this is woefully inadequate. The OT background of Zechariah, Ezekiel and Deuteronomy strongly argue that the image is much broader and includes divine punishment on the sinfulness of His people as well across the centuries.⁴²

I would contend that the broader meaning of divine punishment of human sinfulness throughout history is the fundamental point. God indeed punishes sin in this world through temporal judgments, and wars represent one vehicle of accomplishing this. Clearly this is obvious in the invasions of the Philistines of Israel periodically from the occupation of the promised land through the times of the kingdoms succeeding David and Solomon. God's use of first Assyria in the 700s to punish the northern kingdom through warfare and then in the 500s the southern kingdom through the Babylonians is also affirmed by this image. God has multitudinous ways of expressing His displeasure with our sinful ways, and warfare can be one of them. This divine principle is affirmed by John here as built into the fabric of this world and will burst forth in destructiveness periodically with a huge burst of destruction at the eschatological end of time, which this text is preparing us for and that we will see full force by chapter seventeen. A holy God will never ever ignore human sinfulness and let it go unpunished. We may think we are getting away with our sin because it isn't always punished instantly in obvious ways. But every expression of sin brings punishment both now and at the end of time in final judgment. Most of the time we are too blind to see the punishments being inflicted on us now, but they are real nonetheless and signal a final overwhelming unleashing of the

first cavalier primarily represents warfare, and each of the three following cavaliers represents one of the stereotypical evils of war: sword, famine, and plague." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 395.]

⁴²To inject the assumption that somehow the true people of God have been lifted out of this before the punishments begin is completely arbitrary and totally against the thrust of this passage itself. Never in the Bible are God's people exempted from being punished for their misbehavior. Sin is sin, whoever commits it -- and God will punish it.

wrath of God at the end.

For John's readers in the seven churches of Asia, most of them had been warned of temporal judgments of God for various sinful practices existing in the churches through the seven messages in chapters two and three. The four horsemen in chapters six and seven will re-enforce that warning with the additional tone of its going to get worse as time passes. But also the message comes through loud and clear that the evil men inflicting harm on the people of God will also face God's wrath both now and at the end.

B. Seal Two: red horse, vv. 3-4



3 Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν δευτέραν, ἤκουσα τοῦ δευτέρου ζώου λέγοντος· ἔρχου. 4 καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἄλλος ἵππος πυρρός, καὶ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἐδόθη αὐτῷ λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἵνα ἀλλήλους σφάζουσιν καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ μάχαιρα μεγάλη.

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

The message of the second horseman continues that introduced with the first one. The abbreviated depiction of each horse and rider begins with this second seal. Here are the abbreviations:

1) Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὸ ἀρνίον μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ σφραγίδων is replaced with the shorter Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν δευτέραν, *And I saw when the lamb opened one of the seven seals becomes* *And when he opened the second seal.*

2) και ἤκουσα ἐνὸς ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγοντος ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς is replaced by ἤκουσα τοῦ δευτέρου ζώου λέγοντος, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying becomes I heard the second living creature saying.

3) και ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἔχων τόξον και ἐδόθη αὐτῷ becomes και τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἐδόθη αὐτῷ . . και ἐδόθη αὐτῷ μάχαιρα μεγάλη. And the one sitting upon it having a bow and there was given to him becomes to the one sitting upon it, there was given to him...

4) εἶδον ὅτε ἤνοιξεν... και ἤκουσα is shortened to ὅτε ἤνοιξεν..., ἤκουσα.... I saw when he opened...and I heard becomes when he opened..., I heard.

Not only does each abbreviation assume the fuller details given in the first seal, but also it signals a very close connection of the second through fourth seals to the first one. Seals two through three are the consequence of the first seal. This is confirmed forcibly by the greater details given in the fourth seal.

The second living creature, according to 4:7, had the appearance of an ox, και τὸ δεύτερον ζῶον ὅμοιον μόσχῳ. In a manner parallel to the first seal, when the Lamb opens the second seal and unfolds the scroll to reveal its contents, this ox like creature issues the command ἔρχου, come!, and out comes a red horse with a rider, και ἐξῆλθεν ἄλλος ἵππος πυρρός. And just as with the first rider, God gives a twofold mission to this second rider: και τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἐδόθη αὐτῷ λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς και ἵνα ἀλλήλους σφάζουσιν και ἐδόθη αὐτῷ μάχαιρα μεγάλη, and to the one sitting upon it there was given to him the task of taking peace from the earth also so that they might slaughter one another and was given to him a large sword. No mention is made, like with the first rider, και ἐξῆλθεν, and he went out..., of him departing heaven to go to earth. This is assumed by John.

The symbolism being expressed here has several facets. The pronominal adjective ἄλλος, another, clearly sets up this horse as distinct from the first one, while linking it to the first horse as well. This second horse is also defined as πυρρός, red, which most likely symbolizes blood and death from the sword given to its rider. The color is a bright red.

Again the so-called ‘divine passive’ expression ἐδόθη is repeated twice here and defines the two pronged mission of the rider authorized by God to carry out this task on earth. The task is set forth in two aspects: the objective and the means of reaching objective.

First, the rider is authorized λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς και ἵνα ἀλλήλους σφάζουσιν, to take peace from the earth even so that they slaughter one another. Clearly in the background stands the vision of Ezekiel in 14:12-20, at this point vv. 17-18 in particular.⁴³ And Ezekiel

⁴³Ezek. 14:12-20. 12 Καὶ ἐγένετο λόγος κυρίου πρὸς με

is a reworking of Moses’ warning to the Israelites in Lev. 26:18-33, especially vv. 25, 33.⁴⁴ The four divine

λέγων† 13 Υἱὲ ἀνθρώπου, γῆ ἂν ἀμάρτη μοι τοῦ παραπεσεῖν παράπτωμα και ἐκτενῶ τὴν χεῖρά μου ἐπ’ αὐτὴν και συντρίψω αὐτῆς στήριγμα ἄρτου και ἐξαποστελῶ ἐπ’ αὐτὴν λιμὸν και ἐξαρῶ ἐξ αὐτῆς ἄνθρωπον και κτήνη,† 14 και ἂν ὧσιν οἱ τρεῖς ἄνδρες οὗτοι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς, Νωε και Δανιηλ και Ιωβ, αὐτοὶ ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ αὐτῶν σωθήσονται, λέγει κύριος.† 15 ἂν και θηρία πονηρὰ ἐπάγω ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν και τιμωρήσομαι αὐτὴν και ἔσται εἰς ἀφανισμόν και οὐκ ἔσται ὁ διοδεύων ἀπὸ προσώπου τῶν θηρίων,† 16 και οἱ τρεῖς ἄνδρες οὗτοι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς ὧσι, ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει κύριος, εἰ υἱοὶ ἢ θυγατέρες σωθήσονται, ἀλλ’ ἢ αὐτοὶ μόνοι σωθήσονται, ἢ δὲ γῆ ἔσται εἰς ὄλεθρον.† 17 ἢ και ῥομφαίαν ἂν ἐπάγω ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην και εἶπω Ῥομφαία διελθάτω διὰ τῆς γῆς, και ἐξαρῶ ἐξ αὐτῆς ἄνθρωπον και κτήνος,† 18 και οἱ τρεῖς ἄνδρες οὗτοι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς, ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει κύριος, οὐ μὴ ῥύσονται υἱοὺς οὐδὲ θυγατέρας, αὐτοὶ μόνοι σωθήσονται.† 19 ἢ και θάνατον ἐπαποστελῶ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην και ἐκχεῶ τὸν θυμὸν μου ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἐν αἵματι τοῦ ἐξολεθρευσα ἐξ αὐτῆς ἄνθρωπον και κτήνος,† 20 και Νωε και Δανιηλ και Ιωβ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς, ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει κύριος, ἂν υἱοὶ ἢ θυγατέρες ὑπολειφθῶσιν, αὐτοὶ ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ αὐτῶν ῥύσονται τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν.†

12 The word of the Lord came to me: 13 Mortal, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it human beings and animals, 14 even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord God. 15 If I send wild animals through the land to ravage it, so that it is made desolate, and no one may pass through because of the animals; 16 even if these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would save neither sons nor daughters; they alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate. 17 Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, “Let a sword pass through the land,” and I cut off human beings and animals from it; 18 though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would save neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be saved. 19 Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off humans and animals from it; 20 even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save only their own lives by their righteousness.

⁴⁴Leviticus 26:18-33. 18 και ἂν ἕως τούτου μὴ ὑπακούσητέ μου, και προσθήσω τοῦ παιδεῦσαι ὑμᾶς ἐπτάκις ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν† 19 και συντρίψω τὴν ὕβριν τῆς ὑπερηφανίας ὑμῶν και θήσω τὸν οὐρανὸν ὑμῖν σιδηροῦν και τὴν γῆν ὑμῶν ὡσεὶ χαλκῆν,† 20 και ἔσται εἰς κενὸν ἢ ἰσχύς ὑμῶν, και οὐ δώσει ἡ γῆ ὑμῶν τὸν σπόρον αὐτῆς, και τὸ ξύλον τοῦ ἀγροῦ ὑμῶν οὐ δώσει τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ.† — 21 και ἂν μετὰ ταῦτα πορεύσηθε πλάγιοι και μὴ βούλησθε ὑπακοῦειν μου, προσθήσω ὑμῖν πληγὰς ἐπτά κατὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ὑμῶν† 22 και ἀποστελῶ ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς τὰ θηρία τὰ ἄγρια τῆς γῆς, και κατέδεται ὑμᾶς και ἐξαναλώσει τὰ κτήνη ὑμῶν και ὀλιγοστοὺς ποιήσει ὑμᾶς, και ἐρημωθήσονται αἱ ὁδοὶ ὑμῶν.† — 23 και ἐπὶ τούτοις ἂν μὴ παιδευθῆτε, ἀλλὰ πορεύσηθε πρὸς με πλάγιοι,† 24 πορεύσομαι κἀγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν θυμῷ πλαγίῳ και πατάξω ὑμᾶς κἀγὼ ἐπτάκις ἀντὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν† 25 και ἐπάξω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς μάχαιραν ἐκδικοῦσαν δίκην διαθήκης, και καταφεύξεσθε εἰς τὰς πόλεις ὑμῶν· και ἐξαποστελῶ θάνατον εἰς ὑμᾶς, και παραδοθήσεσθε εἰς χεῖρας ἐχθρῶν.† 26 ἐν τῷ θλίψαι ὑμᾶς σιτοδεία ἄρτων και πέψουσιν δέκα γυναῖκες τοὺς ἄρτους ὑμῶν ἐν κλιβάνῳ ἐνὶ και ἀποδώσουσιν τοὺς ἄρτους ὑμῶν ἐν σταθμῷ, και φάγεσθε και οὐ

judgments in which sins are punished sevenfold in both these OT warnings have framed John's perspective in this vision here. Death and destruction by the sword figures as one of those four judgments that God unleashes on the unfaithful. John's point is that as this principle of punishing sinfulness by the sword that was true for Moses and the Israelites is also a universal, timeless principle still in force and to be implemented at God's pleasure.

The stating of it from the reverse perspective of λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς, to take away peace from the earth, likely has particular meaning to John's readers in the late first century. Modern interpreters are included to define peace from a purely modern perspective as the absence of war. But biblically this is incorrect.

μη ἐμπλησθῆτε. † — 27 ἐὰν δὲ ἐπὶ τούτοις μὴ ὑπακούσητέ μου καὶ πορεύησθε πρὸς με πλάγιοι, † 28 καὶ αὐτὸς πορεύσομαι μεθ' ὑμῶν ἐν θυμῷ πλαγίῳ καὶ παιδεύσω ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ἐπτάκις κατὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ὑμῶν, † 29 καὶ φάγεσθε τὰς σάρκας τῶν υἱῶν ὑμῶν καὶ τὰς σάρκας τῶν θυγατέρων ὑμῶν φάγεσθε. † 30 καὶ ἐρημώσω τὰς στήλας ὑμῶν καὶ ἐξολεθρεύσω τὰ ξύλινα χειροποίητα ὑμῶν καὶ θήσω τὰ κῶλα ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὰ κῶλα τῶν εἰδώλων ὑμῶν, καὶ προσοχθιεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ὑμῖν. † 31 καὶ θήσω τὰς πόλεις ὑμῶν ἐρήμους καὶ ἐξερημώσω τὰ ἅγια ὑμῶν καὶ οὐ μὴ ὀσφρανθῶ τῆς ὀσμῆς τῶν θυσῶν ὑμῶν. † 32 καὶ ἐξερημώσω ἐγὼ τὴν γῆν ὑμῶν, καὶ θαυμάσονται ἐπ' αὐτῇ οἱ ἐχθροὶ ὑμῶν οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ. † 33 καὶ διασπερῶ ὑμᾶς εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, καὶ ἐξαναλώσει ὑμᾶς ἐπιπορευομένη ἡ μάχαιρα· καὶ ἔσται ἡ γῆ ὑμῶν ἔρημος, καὶ αἱ πόλεις ὑμῶν ἔσονται ἔρημοι. †

18 And if in spite of this you will not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins. 19 I will break your proud glory, and I will make your sky like iron and your earth like copper. 20 Your strength shall be spent to no purpose: your land shall not yield its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

21 If you continue hostile to me, and will not obey me, I will continue to plague you sevenfold for your sins. 22 I will let loose wild animals against you, and they shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock; they shall make you few in number, and your roads shall be deserted.

23 If in spite of these punishments you have not turned back to me, but continue hostile to me, 24 then I too will continue hostile to you: I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. **25 I will bring the sword against you, executing vengeance for the covenant; and if you withdraw within your cities,** I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into enemy hands. 26 When I break your staff of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven, and they shall dole out your bread by weight; and though you eat, you shall not be satisfied.

27 But if, despite this, you disobey me, and continue hostile to me, 28 I will continue hostile to you in fury; I in turn will punish you myself sevenfold for your sins. 29 You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. 30 I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars; I will heap your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols. I will abhor you. 31 I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odors. 32 I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. **33 And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste.**

The Greek word εἰρήνη used for 'peace' in the NT is defined by the Hebrew word שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*) for peace via the LXX. Shalom in the OT is much more than the absence of conflict and is defined from a positive perspective rather than from a negative one.⁴⁵ Idealized *shalom* is what Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Thus for this to be taken away is to suffer calamity and disaster, just as Adam and Eve did. War is but one way such could happen. The Greek word εἰρήνη was picked up as the translation word for the Hebrew שָׁלוֹם, due in part to the Greek word having its roots in the verb εἶρω meaning to join. Εἰρήνη, thus, connotes the positive consequences of that relationship. When one is 'joined' to God there is εἰρήνη. Sin interferes with that and destroys, i.e., removes, the εἰρήνη.

When one rejects relationship with God, at some point God simply 'walks away from the rejected relationship' and leaves unchecked the destructive forces that are set in motion by our own sinfulness. In Paul's elaboration of this principle to the Romans in 1:18-32, he uses a dramatic phrase three times to depict the ὀργὴ θεοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ, wrath of God from heaven. With the rejection of God's revealing of Himself to mankind because of human depravity, in verses 24, 26, 28 Paul states that παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς, God handed them over...⁴⁶ That is, God gave them up to what?

v. 24. . . . ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς; in the passions of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves.

v. 26. . . . εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας, αἱ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν, to degrading passion, for the women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another.

v. 28. . . . εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα, to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.

⁴⁵At root it means 'well-being,' with a strong emphasis on the material side.¹³ In meetings or letters well-being is wished to others, and in conversations one asks about their well-being.¹⁴ In prayer the good fortune of the ungodly is called εὐτυχία.¹⁵ Here and in many other instances שָׁלוֹם really signifies bodily health¹⁶ or well-being and the related satisfaction,¹⁷ More commonly שָׁלוֹם is referred to a group, e.g., a nation enjoying prosperity. This brings us closer to the thought of peace. Thus Hezekiah took Isaiah's prophecy of doom lightly because he expected peace to last in his generation.¹⁸ [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 2: 402.]

⁴⁶The Baptist Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, observes about this phrase that it has the sound of clods of dirt falling in on top of a casket.

Paul's phrase παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς is often translated as *God gave them up to....* and signals that God simply backs off from such evil individuals to allow the destructive behaviors they are determined to follow in order to run their course into the complete destruction of the individual. His love is constant but He will not force Himself on individuals who want nothing to do with Him. Theologians sometimes speak of this as a temporal judgment of God. And Paul labels it in v. 18 as the ὀργὴ θεοῦ, *wrath of God*. What Paul stresses is the same thing that John is stressing here: for us, as people created by God, to be able to enjoy a positive life, we must be in relationship with Him. And if we absolutely reject that relationship potential, God can and will step away in order to let the absence of that relationship (John's εἰρήνη being removed) run its destructive course. Given the depths of our depravity such destruction will eventually overwhelm and ruin our lives -- sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but assuredly.

The red horse represents the absence of relationship with God and thus signals destruction ahead. Being given a μάχαιρα μεγάλη, *a huge sword*, re-enforces this image of destruction. The temporal echo of this came in Rev. 3:20 with the image of Christ on the outside of the church seeking permission to come in for fellowship with the congregation. But this comes on the heels of His warning that unless changes take place in the church, He will spit them out of His mouth in rejection (3:16).

Such rejection of God that produces the removal of His εἰρήνη is projected here by John to intensify as history moves toward the eschatological end. The world will find itself sinking further and further into complete destructive chaos as it deepens its rejection of God. Just a quick glance at today's newspapers illustrates this point with countless numbers of wars cropping up just about everywhere on planet earth. Virtually no place on earth is immune to violence and conflict.

C. Seal Three: black horse, vv. 5-6

5 Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τρίτην, ἤκουσα τοῦ τρίτου ζώου λέγοντος· ἔρχου. καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος μέλας, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἔχων ζυγὸν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ. 6 καὶ ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγουσαν· χοῖνιξ σίτου δηναρίου καὶ τρεῖς χοῖνικες κριθῶν δηναρίου, καὶ τὸ ἔλαιον καὶ τὸν οἶνον μὴ ἀδικήσης.

5 *When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, 6 and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living crea-*



tures saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!"

With the introduction of the third seal, most of the abbreviations found in the second seal continues, but some elements found in the first seal re-surface. In particular is the phrase καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος, *and I saw and behold a horse*. The third living creature, who has a human face according to 4:7, cries out to the scroll after the third seal is opened, using the identical command ἔρχου as with the first two living creatures.

At this command there appears a black horse (ἵππος μέλας) with a rider (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν). Black horses formed one of the teams of horses in the vision of Zechariah (cf. 6:2, 6). Traditionally the color black stood as a symbol of darkness and death in the ancient world.⁴⁷ The image of the rider is linked to famine and thus the black horse depicts the death and destruction connected to famine.

The picture of the rider on the horse (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν)⁴⁸ is more detailed than the two previous ones, but conveyed a graphic message to folks living in the first century world.

⁴⁷"The color black had strong negative connotations in antiquity because of its association with darkness and its consequent use as a symbol for death, the underworld, and (in the medieval Church) the Devil. The mention of a black horse is an allusion to one of the four teams of horses pulling chariots in the vision in Zech 6:2, 6. Here the color black apparently symbolizes famine, which is frequently associated with death." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 396.]

⁴⁸Note the parallelism of the initial depiction of the riders on each of the horses:

1. White horse (v. 2) - ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν
2. Red horse (v. 4) - τῷ καθιμένῳ ἐπ' αὐτὸν
3. Black horse (v. 5) - ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτὸν
4. Green horse (v. 8) - ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ

First, he was carrying a set of balance scales: ἔχων ζυγὸν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ, *having a pair of scales in his hand*. Particularly in the OT, the rationing of food through the use of scales to weigh each amount signaled a time of famine and scarcity.⁴⁹

Unique to the third seal is that John heard an additional person speak beyond the third living creature. In addition to ἤκουσα τοῦ τρίτου ζώου λέγοντος, *I heard the third living creature saying* (v. 5) is also καὶ ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν... λέγουσαν, *and I heard like a voice... saying* (v. 6). The voice is located ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων, *in the midst of the four living creatures*, and is unidentified. But the nature of the depiction strongly implies the voice is that of the One sitting on the throne, i.e., God Himself.⁵⁰

What God says to those present around the heavenly throne is interesting: χοῖνιξ σίτου δηναρίου καὶ τρεῖς χοίνικες κριθῶν δηναρίου, καὶ τὸ ἔλαιον καὶ τὸν οἶνον μὴ ἀδικήσης. *“A quart of wheat for a day’s pay, and three quarts of barley for a day’s pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!”*

The measuring reference is a χοῖνιξ, which was the approximate dry measure equivalent of a modern quart or liter. Thus one χοῖνιξ of wheat (σίτος) was selling for one δηνάριον, *denarius*. But three liters, τρεῖς χοίνικες, of barley, κριθῶν, were selling for one denarius, δηναρίου. What gives these selling prices meaning is

⁴⁹“A balance scale consisted of a crossbeam suspended by a hook or cord with a pan suspended from each end of the crossbeam. Weights placed in one pan were used to determine the weight of commodities placed in the other pan. Balance scales are mentioned several times in the OT, often with the protest that they were rigged to cheat customers (Prov 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; Isa 40:12; 46:6; Hos 12:7; Amos 8:5; Mic 6:11). The presence of the balance scales means that in a context of famine bread must be severely rationed and therefore sold by weight, a measure only necessary when bread is an extremely scarce commodity (Lev 26:26; Ezek 4:16). However, since balance scales are useful only for determining weight, and the focus in v 6 is the exorbitant cost of grain by volume, there appears to be a basic inconsistency present. Against Bousset ([1906] 267), then, the presence of the scales is not illuminated by what follows.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 396.]

⁵⁰“Unidentified heavenly voices were relatively rare in Greek tradition according to E. Bevan, *Sibyls and Seers* (London, 1928) 99–100, but they are common in Revelation (9:13; 10:4, 8; 11:12, 15; 12:10; 16:1, 17; 18:4; 19:5; 21:3). A voice from heaven is heard in *Mart. Pol.* 9:1 encouraging Polycarp to be strong. According to Josephus J. W. 6.300, those in the temple heard a voice of a host say, ‘We are departing hence’ (see Tacitus Hist. 5.13). On heavenly voices in early Judaism, see Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen*. Since the unidentified voice comes from the midst of the cherubim, it is likely that both author and readers would have assumed that it was God who was speaking.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 397.]

the first century historical background.⁵¹ The point behind these prices for both wheat and barley is their exorbitant cost: about 8 times the normal price for wheat and 5 1/3 times for barley.⁵² The mentioning of wheat

⁵¹Bible translators face a real dilemma here. If the text is translated more literally within the framework of first century terminology, it conveys virtually no meaning to a modern reader. Extensive footnotes become essential in the translation. But if a more dynamical translation approach is adopted, the problem remains high as well. This because currency terms are an essential part of the text, and to translation one denarius as one dollar is not only incorrect but misleading. And makes sense only to a reader familiar with the US currency of dollars. A more middle ground approach is reflected in the NRSV by translating the equivalent value of a first century Roman δηνάριον as ‘a day’s pay.’

⁵²“This statement suggests an exorbitant price for basic commodities during a period of famine caused either by drought or by war (about eight times the normal price for wheat and five-and-one-third times the normal price for barley) and indicates the relative value of wheat and barley. According to b. Soṭa 49b, produce will soar in price with the advent of the Messiah. One liter of wheat and three liters of barley are mentioned together here because it is the appropriate ration for a cavalryman and his mount, or for an individual and his domestic animals. Here the term ‘liter’ is used as an equivalent to the Greek dry measure called a χοῖνιξ (choinix, pl. choinikes), roughly equal to a day’s ration of wheat for one person (Herodotus 7.187; Xenophon Anabasis 7.3.23; Athenaeus Deipn. 3.98e; Diogenes Laertius 8.18; Livy 4.15.6). Three choinikes of barley was the approximate amount of daily fodder necessary to feed a horse (Polybius 6.39.13; see Stolle, *Der römische Legionar*, 59), while the ration of wheat for a Roman soldier was thirty-two choinikes per month (Polybius 6.39.13–15; two-thirds of a medimnos, which was forty-eight choinikes). 8 χοίνικες = 1 ἔκτεϋς; 6 ἔκτεῖς = 1 μέδιμνος, i.e., a χοῖνιξ is 1/48 of a μέδιμνος. A choinix of barley or a half choinix of wheat per day was regarded as the normal ration for a slave (Thucydides 4.16.1; Athenaeus Deipn. 6.272c). Wheat (*Triticum durum*; Hebrew חֵטְתּ *hitṭū*) was the grain of preference for making bread (Deut 32:14; 1 Kgs 5:21; Isa 28:28; Pss 81:16; 141:14; Ezek 27:17; Sir 39:26; Matt 13:33; Luke 13:21; for a discussion of the varieties of wheat found in the ancient Mediterranean world, see Pliny Hist. nat. 18.63–70). Barley (*Hordeum vulgare*; Hebrew חֵבְבָה *śē.orū*) survives heat and drought better than other cereal grains and has a shorter growing season than wheat. It was used for a beverage called in Latin *tisana* or ‘barley-water,’ for beer (in Egypt), and for porridge, and the stalk was used for fodder (1 Kgs 4:28; Pliny Hist. nat. 18.74) but was not usually used for bread (Pliny Hist. nat. 18.71–75), except among the poorer people and slaves (Judg 7:13 [cf. 6:15–16]; 2 Kgs 4:42; Ant. 5.220–21; John 6:9, 13). According to the Romans, a shortage in the grain supply could be considered a *prodigium*, i.e., a divinely sent sign foreshadowing coming disasters (Tacitus Annals 12.43; see Excursus 6A: Ancient Prodigies and the Plagues of Revelation).

“The author’s emphasis on a denarius as the cost of a liter of wheat and three liters of barley presupposes that this amount represents a daily wage for an average worker (Matt 20:1–16; Tob 5:14). The normal cost for a *choinix* of wheat was about one-eighth of a Greek denarius or two Roman asses, while barley was about half the cost of wheat, i.e., one-sixteenth of a Greek denarius or one Roman ass (2 Kgs 7:1, 16; Polybius 2.15.1; Cicero Verrine Orations 3.81.188). During times of famine, grain prices could rise

and barley together is that one χοῖνιξ of wheat equaled a daily ration for one person, while τρεῖς χοίνικες equaled the daily ration for a horse. For example, the monthly ration of wheat for a Roman soldier was approximately 32 χοίνικες. Wheat was the predominately desired grain for making bread in the ancient world. The combined quantities of wheat and barley represented a typical day's earning for a day laborer according to Matthew 20:1-16 and Tobit 5:14. That food prices sky-rocketed during times of famine in the ancient world was very common. The Greek historian Xenophon in his *Anabasis* (1:5.5-6) lists food prices during famines that were fifty times the normal price. The net impact of such food costs were that poor folks in that world often starved to death. No kind of safety net existed in the first century Roman world to protect peasants from starving during famines. Among the Jews in Palestine, such did exist but not elsewhere in the ancient world.

The second part of the message from the heavenly throne was directed to the rider on the horse pertaining to olive oil and wine: καὶ τὸ ἔλαιον καὶ τὸν οἶνον μὴ ἀδικήσης, **and the olive oil and the wine do not harm.**⁵³ The reasoning behind not harming the olive trees and the grape vines is not certain.⁵⁴ Horticultur-

steeply. The prices mentioned in Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.5.5–6, for example, are fifty times the normal rates.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 397.]

⁵³“This command is directed to the third cavalier as the second- person singular aorist subjunctive verb ἀδικήσης indicates. Further, μὴ ἀδικήσης, ‘do not harm,’ is an aorist of prohibition suggesting that no harm has yet been done. A close parallel occurs in 7:3, where four angels are commanded not to harm (μὴ ἀδικήσητε) the earth, sea, or trees.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 398.]

⁵⁴“Here the terms τὸ ἔλαιον, ‘oil,’ and ὁ οἶνος, ‘wine,’ probably refer, by metonymy, i.e., the effect for the cause (cf. LXX Joel 1:10), to olive trees and vines (cf. the REB translation: ‘But do not damage the olive and the vine’), for the devastation of olive trees and vines would impede production of oil and wine for several years (Swete, 88; Bratcher-Hatton, *Revelation*, 113; BAGD, 248). This phrase can be construed to refer to either an alleviation or an aggravation of the famine. Most commentators have argued that the intent of the prohibition is to lessen the severity of the famine (i.e., an olive tree must be cultivated five years before fruiting, and fifteen to twenty years to mature; vineyards also take several years to establish); i.e., the scarcity of wheat and barley is a partial judgment (Schlier, *TDNT* 2:471; Kraft, 117; I. Broer, *EDNT* 1:426).

“However, if oil and wine are regarded as luxuries (Lohse, 47), the famine could be said to be aggravated by the fact that necessities of life are scarce while the luxuries are unaffected (Moffatt, *The Expositor* 6 [1908] 362–64). Following this line of interpretation, the phrase ‘do not harm the olives and the vines’ can be construed as irony (Moffatt, *The Expositor* 6 [1908] 368–69). However, while oil and wine must be considered of lesser importance than wheat and barley, they cannot be considered luxury products.

“The sparing of the vineyards has been linked to the vine edict

ally an olive tree has to be cultivated at least five years before it begins to produce olives, and 15 to 20 years before the tree comes to maturity for full production. Likewise several years are required for most varieties of grapevines before they become productive. For this reason in the ancient world, most invading armies avoided destroying olive gardens and vineyards when conquering new territory. This tendency may possibly lay in the background of this command. If so, it could imply limited destruction rather than complete destruction is being commanded.⁵⁵ This seems to be more in

of Domitian (see below), though this is far from certain. During the first Jewish revolt (A.D. 66–70), Titus had the ‘gardens’ (presumably consisting of olive trees and vineyards) on the outskirts of Jerusalem destroyed (Jos. J. W. 6.7; these gardens are also mentioned by Timocrates quoted in Eusebius *Praep.* 9.35 [452b–c]), though normally conquering armies avoided cutting down olive trees and burning vineyards (Pausanias 4.7.1; Ramsay, *Cities*, 431–32). Vines and olive trees are generally less affected in the short term by drought, and dry years can in fact be excellent years for the production of wine. In a late rabbinic tradition in b. *Soṭa* 49b, It is said that when the Messiah comes the vine will yield its fruit but the wine will be costly, and according to Jub. 23:18, there will be no grapes or oil during the last wicked generation.

“The meaning of the verb ἀδικεῖν is particularly problematic here. Charles proposes that nine of the eleven occurrences of ἀδικεῖν in Revelation mean ‘to hurt, damage’ (2:11; 6:6; 7:2, 3; 9:4, 10, 19; 11:5[2x]), while the remaining two occurrences mean ‘to act unjustly, to sin’ (Charles, 1:59; 2:222). Black observes that in the LXX ἀδικεῖν is often used to translate רָשָׁע *āšāq*, ‘to oppress, wrong, extort, defraud’ (e.g., Hos 12:8), and suggests that in Rev 6:6 It means ‘do not (fraudulently) withhold the oil and the wine (with the intention of obtaining an exorbitant price)’ (Black, “Some Greek Words,” 144).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 398.]

⁵⁵One sidenote of importance: the command to not damage the wine is often taken to allude to the edict of Domitian (90 to 93 AD) issued several years prior to the writing of Revelation, severely limiting the growing of grapes in the Roman provinces as a way to foster the wine producing industry on the Italian peninsula. Although an attractive connecting point in some ways, it is highly unlikely that this statement from heaven relates to this imperial edict, as Aune discusses:

The phrase καὶ τὸν οἶνον ... μὴ ἀδικήσης, “do not harm the wine,” has been read by Reinach (“*l’Apocalypse*,” 356–80), followed by many others (Gsell, *Essai*, 152; Robinson, *TAPA* 55 [1924] 18; Rostovtzeff, *History* 1:201; 2:599–600; Magie, *Roman Rule* 1:581; Levick, *Latomus* 41 [1982] 68), against the background of an edict that Domitian issued between A.D. 90 and 93 (the edict is dated to A.D. 91–92 by Eusebius-Jerome *Chron.* 3.160 and to A.D. 90 by the *Byzantine Chronicon Paschale* 1.466, but is mentioned only in literary sources) to restrict the growing of vines in the provinces by cutting down half the existing vineyards and prohibiting the planting of new ones (the decree is referred to by several ancient authors: Suetonius *Dom.* 7.2; 14.2; Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 6.42; *Vit. Soph.* 1.21; *Stadius Silvae* 4.3.11–12). Reinach argued that the motivation for this edict was the economic protection of Italian vintners from the overproduction of wine (“*l’Apocalypse*,” 367–77), while Magie proposed that the edict was intended to reduce the dependence of Italy on

line with the somewhat parallel statement in 7:3, **μὴ ἀδικήσητε** τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν, **“Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”**

Famines in the ancient world tended to be devastating to the population when they occurred. They were quite frequent in the province of Asia where the first readers of this document lives.⁵⁶ In the neighboring

imported grain (Roman Rule 1:580). However, Sherwin-White argued convincingly that the edict was motivated by the fear of famine and was intended to encourage grain production (Letters, 258) since, according to Suetonius, this occurred “on the occasion of a plentiful wine crop coinciding with a scarcity of grain” (Dom. 7.2; see P. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988] 225). As Millar phrased it, “too much wine and too little corn was being produced” (Emperor, 391–92). This view has now been widely accepted (Levick, *Latomus* 41 [1982] 67; Hemer, *Letters*, 158; Mitchell, *Anatolia* 1:146). The edict was exceedingly unpopular in Asia Minor. According to Philostratus, the Ionians reportedly sent a delegation to Rome to try to persuade Domitian to change his mind (Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 6.42). In *Vita. Soph.* 1.21, Philostratus is more specific, describing how Scopelian of Clazomenae was part of a delegation from Asia to Domitian that successfully persuaded the emperor to rescind his edict (see Reinach, “Apocalypse,” 361–63). There is some skepticism among modern scholars on this point, however, for there are indications that, apart from Asia Minor, the edict was actually put into effect in various times and places (Levick, *Latomus* 41 [1982] 69–71).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 398–399.]

⁵⁶Famines in Anatolia occurred with relative frequency in antiquity (Magie, *Roman Rule* 1:481; Garnsey, *Famine*, 218–27, highlights twenty-three food crises experienced in the Roman empire, with emphasis on the city of Rome; Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 145–46, discusses the famines in Asia Minor during the first century A.D.), in part because the region was urbanized, had an unreliable climate, and was largely dependent on grain imported from the Black Sea. According to Rostovtzeff, ‘the spectre of famine now hovered continually before the Greek cities’ (*History* 1:201). Acts 11:28 reports a supposedly worldwide famine under Claudius in A.D. 44; there were famines during his reign (Suetonius *Claud.* 19; Tacitus *Annals* 12.43), but this one was almost certainly limited to Palestine. Another famine occurred in Palestine during the rule of Tiberius Alexander (A.D. 46–48) according to Josephus (*Ant.* 20.101), though this may be identical to that reported in Acts 11:28. At Aspendus in Pamphylia, during the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14–37), there was a famine that was exacerbated by grain merchants who hoarded their stores (Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 1.15). Toward the end of Vespasian’s reign, there was a famine in Prusa and a consequent riot against the rich, who were thought to have hoarded grain (Dio Chrysostom *Orat.* 46). However, if the dating of the vine edict of Domitian to A.D. 91–92 discussed above is correct, it is possible to correlate this edict with the widespread famine in Asia Minor addressed by the edict of L. Antitius Rusticus the legate of Galatia-Cappadocia, published at Pisidian Antioch in A.D. 91–94 (Rostovtzeff, *History* 1:201; 2:599–600; Magie, *Roman Rule* 1:581). Following a severe winter, there was a serious

province of Galatia, a huge famine wiped out significant numbers of people in 91–94 AD, and prompted an edict of Antitius Rusticus, the Roman legate of Galatia-Cappadocia, to order within 30 days a reporting by every resident of the supply of grain on hand. Extra supplies had to be sold to the grain merchants at not more than one denarius per *modius*, which was double the normal price of grain.

Thus the directing of famine to occur on the earth from heaven signaled an all too clear picture of suffering by these initial readers of Revelation. But to link Rev. 6:6 with this famine or with the edict of the emperor Domitian a few years prior to the writing of Revelation is highly unlikely.⁵⁷ What is considerably more certain is the general tendency in the ancient world to view famine as expressing the anger of the god(s) in an act of punishing humans on the earth.

D. Seal Four: pale green hose, vv. 7-8

famine in Asia Minor causing the price of grain to soar, and the inhabitants of Pisidian Antioch had responded to the crisis by hoarding. The legate ordered all colonists (*coloni*) and residents (*incolae*) of Antioch to report within thirty days the quantity of grain they possessed and the amount needed to support each household for that year and the next planting. Excess grain had to be sold to the grain merchants at not more than one denarius per *modius*, i.e., double the pre-famine price, which was eight asses per *modius*.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 399–400.]

⁵⁷Several important points can be made: (1) The prohibition against harming oil and wine in Rev 6:6 can be correlated with the fact that, at least in Asia Minor, the vine edict of Domitian was apparently rescinded, perhaps suggesting divine intervention (the voice prohibiting the harming of olive trees and vines comes from the midst of the four cherubim and is evidently the voice of God). (2) There is little evidence that the vine edict of Domitian was promulgated because of a famine (Beckwith, 522). Indeed, such a measure can only be construed in terms of its long-term effects, i.e., to encourage the planting of grains rather than vineyards, though the vine edict may have been provoked by the famine in Asia (Mitchell, *Anatolia* 1:146). (3) The frequency of famines in various parts of the empire means that it is difficult to correlate the famine anticipated in Rev 6:6 with any particular historical event (see Torrey, *Apocalypse*, 79; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating*, 238). (4) The motif of famine occurs frequently in Jewish apocalyptic expectation (Isa 14:30; Ezek 6:11–12; Mark 13:8 = Matt 24:7 = Luke 21:11; 4 Ezra 15:5, 49; 16:18–22, 34, 46). (5) While vineyards are explicitly mentioned in the vine edict of Domitian, oil or olive trees are not mentioned, an omission requiring explanation (Beckwith, 522; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating*, 238 n. 94; Prigent, 111). (6) Famines occurred with some frequency in the ancient world and were often understood as *prodigies*, i.e., as signs warning of divine anger (Dionysius Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.17.3; Wülker, *Prodigienwesen*, 21–22; see Excursus 6A: Ancient Prodigies and the Plagues of Revelation). It may be concluded that the reference to prohibiting the harming of oil and wine (olive trees and vineyards) cannot be certainly correlated with the vine edict of Domitian.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 400.]



7 Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην, ἤκουσα φωνὴν τοῦ τετάρτου ζώου λέγοντος· ἔρχου. 8 καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος χλωρός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ὄνομα αὐτῷ [ὁ] θάνατος, καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἠκολούθει μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς ἀποκτεῖναι ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ ἐν λιμῷ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων τῆς γῆς.

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!" 8 I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.

The language of the fourth seal begins with the same abbreviated structure found in the second and third seals: Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην, ἤκουσα φωνὴν τοῦ τετάρτου ζώου λέγοντος· ἔρχου, When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying. According to Rev. 4:7, this living creature had the appearance of a flying eagle: τὸ τέταρτον ζῶον ὅμοιον ἀετῷ πετομένῳ. Thus the pattern is continued: the Lamb opens the seal and unrolls the scroll further and a living creature commands a horse and rider to come out of the scroll. From that point the descriptions go their individual ways with a picture of both the horse (only its color) and the rider with more detail given in terms of what is held by him and what is said to him.

The fourth horse is identified as pale green: καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος χλωρός, and I saw and behold a pale green horse. Here the picture is introduced by καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος following the same formula language in the third seal (v. 5) and the first seal (v. 2). As

was suggested in the comments on v. 2, the καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ, which one finds in the LXX translation especially in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, is probably being copied from these OT prophets in his expression here.⁵⁸ The color χλωρός which although often used to refer to grass and plants was frequently linked to the pallor of corpses or to sick people.⁵⁹ It is this association with death and sickness that is intended here, as the two names of the riders makes clear.

Unlike the first three riders, not only is the fourth rider identified, but an accomplice riding with him is also identified: καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ὄνομα αὐτῷ [ὁ] θάνατος, καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἠκολούθει μετ' αὐτοῦ, and the one sitting on top of him, whose name was the Death, and Hades was following with him. Although not stated for the sake of literary balance in the four seals, ὁ ἄδης is evidently also riding another horse, presumeably green as well. Death shows up four times in Revelation (1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14) in personified expression, and always linked to Hades. Very likely Death is the one who reigns over Hades. That is, Death is a person while Hades is his kingdom.⁶⁰ The images, however, are widely used

⁵⁸“The phrase [καὶ] εἶδον [= ἰδον] καὶ ἰδοὺ does occur in the LXX (where it translates the Hebrew phrases *wā-ēre, wēhinnēh* or *ra-iti wēhinnēh*, particularly in Ezekiel (1:4, 15; 2:9; 8:7, 10; 10:1, 9; 37:8; 44:4; cf. Gen 33:1; Jer 4:2; 2 Chr 23:13), though it is relatively rare in Jewish-Greek literature (see Jos. As. 10:16; 14:9). It is possible that the author is imitating the LXX style of Ezekiel.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 393.]

⁵⁹“The adjective χλωρός means ‘green, pale green,’ often used to describe the color of grass and other vegetation (Gen 1:30; 4 Kgdms 19:26; Ezek 17:24; Mark 6:39; MM, 639). In Gen 2:5 and Rev 9:4, *πᾶν χλωρόν*, literally ‘every green thing,’ means ‘every plant.’ χλωρός also means ‘pale greenish gray’ (Louw-Nida, § 79.34–35), the color associated with the faces of the sick (Hippocrates Progn. 2) and the pallor of corpses. χλωρός is also used to describe fear (Iliad 7.479; Odyssey 11.43, 633, ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρόν δέος ἦρει, ‘pale fear seized me’). Sappho describes the anticipated symptoms of lovesickness: ‘I am greener [χλωροτέρα] than the grass; I feel very near to death’ (Longinus De sublimata 10.2). The author continues the allusion to the fourth team of horses drawing a chariot in Zech 6:3, 7, where the horses are referred to as *אַמּוּשִׁים, āmuššim* (rendered ‘fleshcolored, piebald’ in KB3 63, and ‘dappled gray’ in the NRSV), which usually means ‘strong’ but here apparently is used as the fourth of four colors, translated by the LXX as *ποικίλος ψαρός*, a peculiar combination because both adjectives mean ‘spotted, dappled’ and have no particular connection with a specific color. By translating *אַמּוּשִׁים, āmuššim* with χλωρός, the author of Revelation presumably wished to emphasize the associations of the Greek term with sickness, fear, and death.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 400–401.]

⁶⁰“καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ὄνομα αὐτῷ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἠκολούθει μετ' αὐτοῦ, ‘and the name of the cavalier was Death, and Hades was following after him.’ Death is personified four times in Revelation (1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14), and each time it

in Jewish writings and also in Greco-Roman literature. When paired together as here the point is the full scope of death and the underworld connected to death.

The most significant aspect of the picture in the fourth seal is the authority granted to them by God: καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς

is linked to a personified Hades (though in 1:18 τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ἄδου are probably objective genitives and therefore, using *hendiadys*, refer to a place; see Comment on 1:18). Since ‘Death’ always comes before ‘Hades’ in those four references, It is probable that ‘Death’ is considered the one who reigns over ‘Hades’; i.e., ‘Death’ is a person while ‘Hades’ is his kingdom. In Greek literature, the expression ‘to go to the house of Hades’ means ‘to die,’ indicating that these two notions are closely associated. While Death is occasionally personified alone (Isa 25:8; Jer 9:21; Job 18:13; Prov 13:14; in T. Abr. Death is personified as an angel: T. Abr. [Rec. A] 16–20; [Rec. B] 13–14; see the Greek conception of Hades with wings in Kaibel, *Epigrammata Graeca*, 89.4), when Sheol or Hades is personified, It is equated with Death, and so both Death and Hades (מָוֶת *māwet* and שְׁאוֹל *šī.ōl*), or Mot and Sheol, are occasionally personified together in the OT (Isa 28:15, 18; Hos 13:14; Hab 2:5; Pss 18:5–6; 49:14[MT 15]; 116:3), always in poetic contexts. Death and Hades are also paired in some early Jewish texts, usually in poetic contexts (Sir 14:12; Pss. Sol. 16:2; 4 Ezra 8:53 [mors and infernum]). Mot was a Canaanite god (N. J. Tromp, *Death*; M. S. Smith, *God*, 52–53). Death or Thanatos is also personified in Greek and Latin texts (Hesiod *Theog.* 211; Orphic Hymns 87; Aristophanes *Frogs* 1392; Euripides *Alcestis*, *passim*; Cicero *De natura deorum* 3.17.44; Vergil *Aeneid* 11.197) but is never worshiped (Kleine Pauly 5:648–49). Hades was almost never worshiped, though in Elis there was a temple to Hades (Strabo 8.3.14; Pausanias 6.25.2). In early Christian literature, Hades is occasionally personified in order to identify it with Death (Acts of Pilate 20–24; Melito Pass. 22, 55, 102; see Lampe, *LPGL* 32). In Greek tradition Hades is both an underworld deity and a name for the underworld itself (see Comment on 1:18). Hades is occasionally personified in early Jewish literature (3 Apoc. Bar. 4:6; Sib. Or. 3.393, 480). The clause ‘and Hades was following after him’ is regarded as an interpolation by Charles (1:274). Charles is probably correct, for the phrase is awkward at this point since either two figures are understood as mounted on the third horse (in which case ὁ καθήμενος should be οἱ καθήμενοι), or Hades follows on another mount, which seems improbable since only one horse is mentioned.

“In Greek mythology the underworld is personified by the god Hades (*Iliad* 15.188; Hesiod *Theog.* 455), who figures prominently in many myths. Though in classical Greek Hades is referred to always as a person and never a place (*Iliad* 23.244), in Hellenistic Greek Hades can be referred to either as a person or as a place (Ant. 6.332; J. W. 1.596; 2.156; 3.375; PGM I.179; IV.2317; XVI.8, 17, 25). Hades can be represented as a malevolent being who causes a person’s death (Lattimore, *Epitaphs*, 147–48). Death and Sleep (Thanatos and Hypnos) are personified as a famous pair of brothers (Hesiod *Theog.* 211–12, 756–57; *Iliad* 14.231; 16.672, 682); Pausanias reports that there were statues of them at Sparta (3.18.1). They represent the cessation of life but are not depicted as killers (E. Vermeule, *Death*, 37–41, 145–46; J. Hjertén, *Hypnos och Thanatos i Dict och Konst* [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksel, 1951]).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 401–402.]

ἀποκτεῖναι ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ ἐν λιμῷ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων τῆς γῆς, and granted to them was authorization to kill a fourth of the earth by sword and by famine, and by death and from the wild beasts of the earth. The so-called ‘divine passive’ is used here in ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, given to them. This matches the riders in the second and first seals (ἐδόθη αὐτῷ, was given to him). These three seals contain through this expression an explicit ‘job assignment’ to the riders, which comes from ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον, the One sitting upon the throne. In the third seal it is the voice of God directly who makes the announcement of famine to those on earth as symbolized by the balance scales in the third rider’s hand.

What is given to Death and Hades (note the plural αὐτοῖς, to them, over against αὐτῷ, to him, in the first and second seals) is ἐξουσία. Although this often translated as ‘authority’ the English word ‘authorization’ is actually more accurate to the Greek word. There is no transfer of power from God to the riders that takes place. Rather, what is granted is authorization for the riders to carry out a divinely given mission in behalf of God. God’s power is what enables the mission to be achieved.

The granting of ἐξουσία to Death and Hades compares to a στέφανος, a crown that symbolized victory and success to conquer (1st rider, v. 2) and to both λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἵνα ἀλλήλους σφάζουσιν, to take peace out of the earth so that they might also slaughter one another, and a μάχαιρα μεγάλη, a large sword (v. 4).

The specifics of that authorization are spelled out as ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς ἀποκτεῖναι ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ ἐν λιμῷ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων τῆς γῆς, upon a fourth of the earth to kill by sword and by famine and by death and by means of the wild beasts of the earth. When one notices the above mentioning of warfare, famine, and death in the first three seals being reduplicated here in the fourth seal, it becomes apparent that the fourth seal is mostly summarizing the missions of the first three.⁶¹ The impact of this is clear: we must

⁶¹“The plural pronoun αὐτοῖς, ‘to them,’ either refers to Death and Hades and this sentence forms a conclusion to the fourth seal, or the pronoun refers to all four cavaliers and this sentence forms a conclusion to the entire textual unit in 6:1–8 (Lohmeyer, 62; Rissi, Zeit, 89). Although four plagues are included in this summary of the activity of the four cavaliers, It is not possible to correlate each plague with a particular cavalier. The term for ‘sword’ in v 3 (μάχαιρα) is different from the term for ‘sword’ here in v 8 (ῥομφαία). The reason for this is simply that the list of plagues is a traditional list of disasters that ensue from divine judgment or chastisement. That several early Jewish texts place ῥομφαία, λιμός, and θάνατος (the latter meaning ‘pestilence’) in close association, and one even includes the mention of wild animals, indicates the traditional and formulaic character of this list of types of misfortune. A triad of afflictions occurs frequently in certain portions of the OT, namely, the Deuteronomic portions of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Page 23

and Chronicles: (1) חרב *hereb*, ‘sword,’ (2) רעב *rā.āb*, ‘famine,’ and (3) דבר *deber*, ‘plague, pestilence’ (Jer 14:12; 21:9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17–18; 32:24, 36; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13; Ezek 6:11; 12:16; 4QpPsa 1–10 ii 1); see O. Kaiser, TDOT 5:164–65. Rev 6:8 may allude to Ezek 14:21 (see Ezek 5:16–17; Deut 32:23–25), where the triad is supplemented by the addition of ‘evil beasts’ (היה רעה *wēḥayyū rā.ū*): ‘For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four sore acts of judgment, sword, famine, evil beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast!’ (cf. the ‘four kinds of destroyers’ in Jer 15:3). Yet the closest verbal parallel with all four types of destruction that includes the four plagues in the very same order in which they occur in Rev 6:8 is Pss. Sol. 13:2–3 (my tr.), ‘The arm of the Lord saved us from the sword [ῥομφαία], which passes through, from the famine [λιμός] and pestilence [θάνατος] belonging to sinners. Wild animals [θηρία] rushed upon them; with their teeth they tore their flesh’). Other parallels include Jer 14:12 (sword, famine, plague); Jer 15:3 (plague, sword, famine, captivity); Jer 43:11 (pestilence, captivity, sword); Pss. Sol. 15:7 (famine, sword, and pestilence are far from the righteous); Sib. Or. 3.335 (sword, famine, plague); Sib. Or. 3.316–17 (sword, famine, plague). Also of some interest is the report of the casualties suffered by the Jews in the second revolt of A.D. 132–35 preserved in the epitome of Dio Cassius 69.1–2 (LCL tr.):

Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles [i.e., the sword], and the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past finding out. Thus nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate, a result of which the people had had forewarning before the war. For the tomb of Solomon, which the Jews regard as an object of veneration, fell to pieces of itself and collapsed, and many wolves and hyenas rushed howling into their cities.

“Here we find battle, famine, disease, fire, and wild animals, with the entire description following the stereotyped conception of such a destruction.

“According to Dio Chrysostom Or. 38.20 (see Mussies, Dio, 248), a plague (λοιμός) or an earthquake can be attributed to the gods, who are thought to use such apparently natural disasters to punish people for their sins, though no one attributes war to the gods. Similarly, Hierocles the Stoic (second century A.D.) has a stereotypical list of natural disasters that he thinks are sometimes caused by the gods (*On Duties* 1.3.54; tr. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation*, 87):

For just as pestilence and drought, and also deluges of rain, earthquakes, and everything of this kind are for the most part produced by certain other physical causes, but at times are caused by the gods when it is critical that the sins of the masses be punished publicly and generally ...

“The Romans regarded both plagues (F. B. Krauss, *Interpretation*, 80–87) and earthquakes (Krauss, *Interpretation*, 49–53) as prodigies, i.e., warnings of a breach in the relationship between people and the gods, a breach requiring expiation (see Excursus 6A: Ancient Prodigies and the Plagues of Revelation). The terms λιμός, ‘famine,’ and λοιμός, ‘plague’ — the latter closely related to θάνατος, ‘pestilence’ — are often linked (Hesiod *Works and Days* 243; Herodotus 7.171; 8.115; Thucydides 1.23.3 [a list of disasters that affected the Athenians during the Peloponnesian war: earthquakes, eclipses, droughts, famines, and pestilence]; Oenomaus of Gadara in Eusebius Praep. evang. 5.19.1; Sib. Or. 2.23; 3.332; Luke 21:11; Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 9.8.11; Andreas *Comm. in Apoc.* 6:8). The mention of people killed by wild animals occurs as a sep-

understand the actions of the four riders as happening simultaneously, and not sequentially. This reality is



more accurately represented artistically by the above approach to all four horses and riders by placing them together, than by the drawing below with the horses in a line following the sequence of listing in Revelation six.



Thus the four horses and their riders represent a single unity of divine edict of judgment upon the earth for its sinfulness, and especially for its persecution of the people of God. By John’s heavy use of the OT prophets of Ezekiel and Zechariah, he affirms their contenarate motif in T. Abr. (Rec. A) 10:6–7; (Rec. B) 12:10–11.

“‘To kill with the sword’ sounds like a parody of the Roman *ius gladii*, ‘law of the sword,’ i.e., the power to punish individual criminals (Digest 2.1.3; A. Berger, *Roman Law*, 529). Several OT prophetic oracles of doom predict that wild animals will devour both domesticated animals and people as a punishment (Lev 26:22; Deut 28:38, 39, 42; 32:24; Jer 5:6; 8:17; Ezek 5:17; Hos 13:7–8; Lam 3:10–11; see Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 54–56). Blessings are sometimes couched in terms of the absence of such ferocious wild animals (Isa 35:9; Hos 2:20). A number of ancient Near Eastern treaty curses state that wild animals will come upon a land as a punishment for violating the terms of the treaty, e.g., “May Bethel and Anath Bethel put you at the mercy of a devouring lion” (Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 54–55).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 402–403.]

tion that the God who created this world in purity and freedom from corrupting sinfulness will hold the people on earth accountable who are the culprits that have polluted His creation with their sinfulness. This reaching back to the OT by John not only for images but for the principles conveyed by those images asserts the continuity of the teachings of early Christianity with that Hebrew heritage. The understanding of God in early Christianity is derived out of the rich treasures of the Hebrew scriptures and remains in continuity with it. John's message is that this God never changes and remains true to His nature and character for all eternity. He stands as Creator of the world and thus as Judge over the world for all eternity. Among depraved humanity He has redeemed out a special people unto Himself and they alone will share eternal blessings with Him because of their commitment to Him and to the slain Lamb. This will become the theme of the fifth and sixth seals followed by the 'interlude' in chapter seven.

For the initial readers in the seven churches of Asia Minor at the end of the first century such a message came through both as warning and as assurance. Most of them had come out of paganism into Christianity, with many of them probably initially as God-fearers in the local Jewish synagogues. That Christianity stood not only as a religion with universal scope but also as one built on the foundation of the religious heritage of the Jews provided tremendous encouragement and affirmation of its legitimacy.

From a confusing mess of gods and goddesses who quarreled and fought with one another as often as anything else, they found in the Gospel a religious message of reconciliation with the one true God who stood as both Creator and Redeemer. To be sure, commitment to this God brought hostility from neighbors and family who clung to their pagan ways. But John's message to them out of his vision of heaven was a word that their God is eternal, never changing, and holds all fully accountable for what they do, especially to the people of God. And as the next study on 6:9-17 will demonstrate, it contained a message of reassurance that God will protect His people and reward them in eternity for their faithfulness to Him in times of distress.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What does this text say to us today? A whole lot, when properly understood!

First, the core application is the same message that John presented to his first century readers in the seven churches: God holds the people world fully accountable for their perversion of His creation. That wrath of God is being expressed repeatedly through out human history in the wars, famine, pestilence etc. brought about through human depravity. As time moves

forward on earth, such punishments intensify and ultimately point to a cataclysmic destruction at the end of human history.

Second, this message is no new innovation of the newly emerging religion of Christianity. To the contrary, it stands in complete conformity to the centuries old religious heritage of the Jews and is reflected in the prophetic messages of their prophets. Their visions of God and heaven provide the foundation for Christianity's vision of heaven and God. Thus this message about God and His demands upon people has existed for hundreds of years going all the way back to Moses, over a thousand years earlier than Christianity.

In contrast to the continually changing images of the Greco-Roman religious systems, this vision of the one true God remains stable and unchanging. The Greek and Roman early ideas of their various deities bear little resemblance to the contemporary first century conceptualizations. Their gods and goddesses were always evolving into something different, usually something more perverse and dangerous. But the God of Israel is eternal and unchanging. And He is the exact same God that Christians worship. Thus what He said through His prophets hundreds of years earlier He is now saying through His Christian spokesmen such as the Apostle John. John's first readers could find encouragement in that.

And so ought we in our world as well. We don't worship a deity who undergoes constant re-imagining by human description and assertion. God is not something we create for our personal convenience! He remains the same throughout eternity, and what He declares to us through His prophetic spokesmen in sacred scripture reflects that continuity of God. Thus what John declared to his first readers about the wrath of God on human sinfulness here in these four seals remains just as relevant and applicable today as it was 1,900 years ago in the Roman province of Asia.

We live in a 'modern' age of denial of sinfulness and of human accountability, either by society or by deity. The message of the four seals clashes head on with this modern deception and exposes it as the pure delusion that will prove suicidal in the long run. God hates sin because of what it has done to His beautiful creation. His pure, holy nature stands in total conflict with the depravity of humanity. Out of pure compassion, He has redeemed a people out of that moral cesspool of depravity for Himself. Through the Lamb they have been cleaned up to be acceptable to Him, and prepared for eternal fellowship with Him. But the rest of depraved humanity cling to their sinfulness in rebellion of Him and of the offer of salvation through the Lamb. And this rejection comes with the price of being overwhelmed by the wrath of God in judgments being exe-

cuted both now and at the end of human history. There is absolutely no escaping this wrath from Heaven!