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A0541 – October 9, 2005 – Revelation 6:1-8 – The Four Horsemen

The seven-sealed scroll first appeared in Revelation 5:1. We discovered that the scroll was a title deed to the earth. A search was made for one worthy to open the seals beginning in heaven then moving to earth and finally under the earth. This universe-wide search did not result in the discovery of anyone worthy and this caused John to weep loudly. Then one of the 24 elders stepped forward and told John to stop weeping because the Lion of the tribe of Judah had overcome so as to open the seals. This was not a time to weep but a time to rejoice. The Lion, in all his majestic strength, is also portrayed as a Lamb, standing as if slain. He bears the marks of the crucifixion but He is alive and well, the first-fruits of resurrection. When the Lamb takes the scroll from the Father's right hand the four living creatures and the 24 elders fall down before Him and sing a new song about the redemptive work of the Lamb. Then ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands of angels join in this chorus and chant, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.*" Finally, the chorus grows to include all creation and they chant, "*To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.*"

Now, the action of breaking the seals first anticipated in Rev 5 begins in chapter 6. The fact that Rev 4-5 described the throne room of God and designated the Lamb as the only one worthy to open the seals demonstrates that the wrath poured out in the first six seals is wrath that is coming from heaven. It is therefore God's wrath and not Satan's wrath. Some bible students claim that the church remains on earth during the first six seals and will be removed after them (pre-wrath rapture). To hold this position they must prove that the first six seals are not God's wrath but Satan's wrath. The problem with this is 1 Thess 5:9-10 where Paul says that God has not destined us for eschatological wrath (i.e. Day of the Lord wrath, cf v 2).

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

This verse says that no matter whose wrath it is; God's or Satan's, those who are members of Christ's body are not destined for eschatological (future) wrath. To leave Christ's body on earth during this period of time would be to expose Christ's own body to wrath. Besides, Rev 4-5 make clear that only the Lamb who stands as if slain is worthy to open the seals. If Christ is opening the seals then the wrath is a direct result of His actions and not Satan's and Christ would be pouring out wrath on His own body! Thus, the six seals are God's wrath and the church saints must already be removed from the earth (pre-trib rapture). This corresponds with the promise to the Philadelphia church in

Revelation 3:10b And I will keep you from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

So, the church, Christ's body, has already been removed from the earth sometime before the Lamb breaks the first seal. Let's now read the account of the first four seals which are the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Revelation 6:1-8 Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." ² I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. ³ When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." ⁴ And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that *men* would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him. ⁵ When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶ And I heard *something* like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine." ⁷ When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." ⁸ I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Outline:

- I. The First Six Seals: “The Beginning of Birth Pangs” (Rev 6)
 - A. The 1st Seal: Peaceful Conquest (6:1-2)
 - B. The 2nd Seal: Warfare and Bloodshed (6:3-4)
 - C. The 3rd Seal: Famine (6:5-6)
 - D. The 4th Seal: Death to ¼ of Human Population (6:7-8)

The four horsemen obviously set these four seals apart as a unit and so this is the way we will study them.

- I. The First Six Seals: “The Beginning of Birth Pangs” (Rev 6)
 - A. The 1st Seal: Peaceful Conquest (6:1-2)

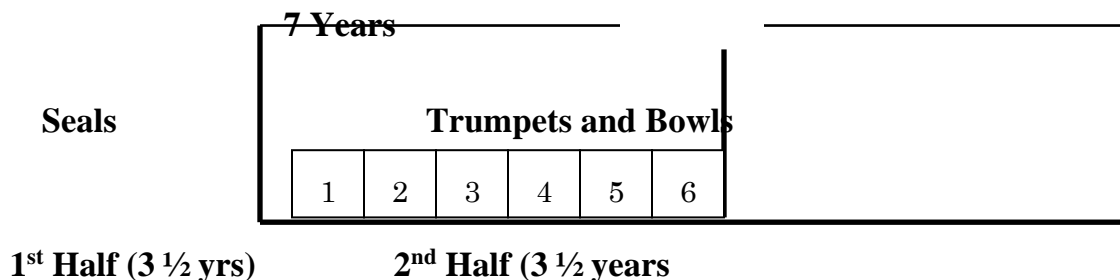
Revelation 6:1 And I looked when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." ² I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

The words ***And I looked*** (*kai eidon*) signal a new aspect of John’s vision. John’s spirit remains in heaven but the scene shifts to the sequential breaking of the seals. It should be emphasized that the opening of each seal and the judgment of each seal occur in sequence. There is no overlap of the seal judgments. For example, the 1st seal will be opened, its judgment released on the earth and it will end before the 2nd seal is opened and its judgment released on the earth.

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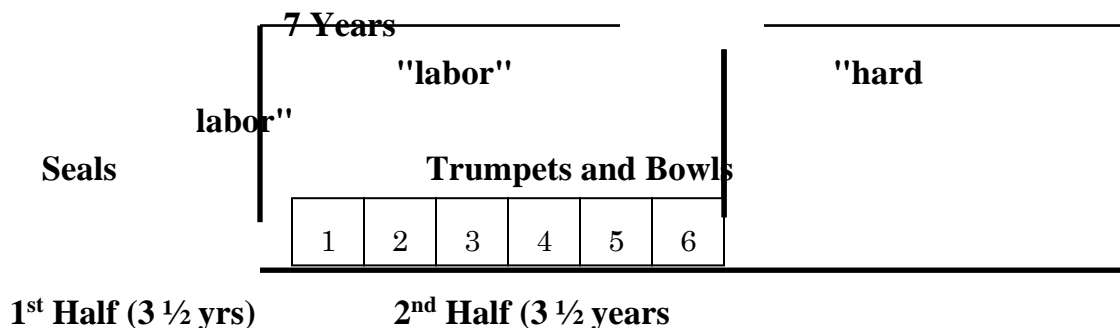
Further, my understanding is that the first six seals will cover the entire first half of the Tribulation, what is known as the “beginning of the birth pangs” in Matt 24:8. So, I see a parallel between what Jesus said in Matt 24:5-8 and the first six seals.

**70th Week of Daniel 9
Tribulation**

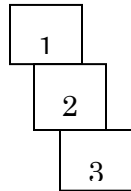


Some opt to place the seven trumpet judgments during the 1st half of the Tribulation (e.g. Ice, LaHaye, Fruchtenbaum), but my exegesis has resulted in placing them during the 2nd half of the Tribulation when the judgments begin to compound and intensify greatly as the world grows closer to the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31; Mal 4:5) and the birth of the Messianic Age (as do Pentecost, Thomas, Showers). This fits well with the striking parallels between the six seals and Jesus’ description of the “beginning of birth pangs” in Matt 24:5-8 (cf Luke 21:8-11; Mark 13:6-8).

70th Week of Daniel 9
2 Divisions of Birth Pangs



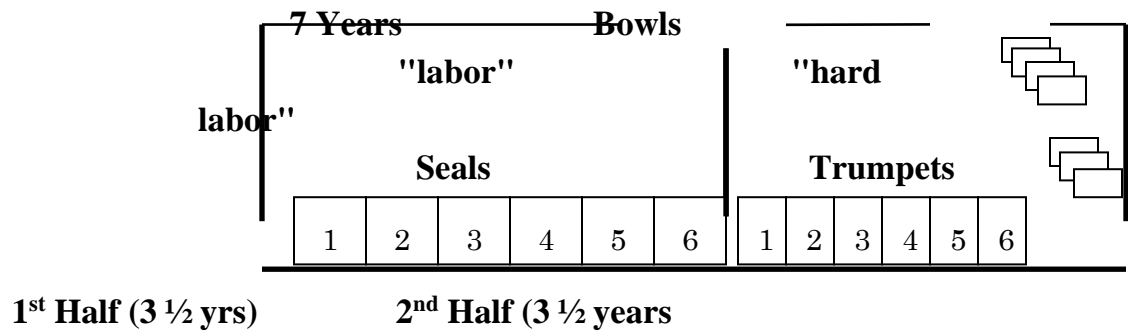
The trumpet judgments are the same. They are also sequential. One trumpet is blown and the judgment is released on the earth and then it ends before the second trumpet is blown and its judgment released. However, the bowl judgments are different. They are poured out sequentially but the judgment of one bowl remains on the earth even while the next bowl is poured out so that there is a great intensification of the judgments coming on the world as the climax of the judgment phase of the day of the Lord nears and results in the second coming of Christ.



So, the seals and trumpets are sequential and chronologically successive but the bowls while sequentially poured out are not chronologically successive; before one ends another has already begun.

70th Week of Daniel 9
2 Divisions of Birth Pangs

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Returning to the text of Rev 6:1, John looks the Lamb breaks the first of the seven seals. The seven-sealed scroll is Christ's title deed to the earth which He purchased by His redeeming work on the cross. Thus, Christ has every right to use whatever means necessary

to evict the usurper Satan and those aligned with him from planet earth and establish His kingdom. Here the Lamb (*arnion*) breaks the first of the *seven seals*. The Lamb does not read the contents aloud but obviously whatever it says is reflected in what takes place in verses 1-2.

Then John hears *one of the four living creatures saying with a voice of thunder, "Come"*. The *four living creatures* (*zoon*) were introduced in 4:6-9 as seated immediately around the Father's throne. They are angelic beings who represent all animate creation. Each of the four horsemen is called forth by one of the *four living creatures* (cf 6:1, 3, 5, 7). The *voice* with which he summons the first horse and rider is a *voice of thunder* signifying the terrible judgment which is about to begin. The first of *four living creatures* says "*Come*".ⁱ

In response to this summons, verse 2, *I looked*, and *behold, a white horse*. So, it's clear that when the living creature said "*come*" he was summoning the first horse and rider. The *horse* is *white* and the rider *has a bow*. *white* often symbolizes "righteousness" but the context is clear that this is only a false-righteousness, a counterfeit of the true righteousness. There are ten different identifications of the *white horse* and *rider*. My conclusion is that they symbolize a growing movement of false Christ's. Christ said of this time, "many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ'" (Matt 24:5). So, about the time the Tribulation begins many antichrists will rise. So, the *white horse* and rider are personifications of this future rise of antichrists. Out of these antichrists one will come forth and be the ultimate end-times personality known as the "first beast" in Revelation 13:1-10.

Notice, the one sitting on the *white horse...had a bow*; The *bow* is an instrument of war and often symbolizes victory (Zech 9:13-14). This is certainly the case here as verse 2 indicates. But it is significant that there is no mention of arrows. The meaning is therefore that these antichrists will carry out a concerted victory without the shedding of blood. This will be a peaceful military conquest (a *coup de tat*). Near the end of this seal *a crown* will be *given to him*.ⁱⁱ The *crown* that he is *given* is a *stephanos* crown which is a crown of victory. He is given this crown in advance of his conquest but it looks forward to his distinguished career of conquest that will result in victory. The tenses of *conquering and to conquer* show that they go forth *conquering* for a period of time with the goal of ultimately *conquering*. That is, they go forth to be victorious and establish worldwide domination and peace. It will appear that he fulfills this goal but it will be a very short lived domination as is seen with the 2nd Seal.

B. The 2nd Seal: Warfare and Bloodshed (6:3-4)

Revelation 6:3 And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." 4 And another, a fiery-red horse, came forth; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, even that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

The 2nd Seal corresponds to Christ's teaching on wars and rumors of wars and nations rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom (Matt 24:6-7a). While the world has seen some nations rise against other nations and some kingdoms rise against other kingdoms it has never seen warfare on this scale. There is literally worldwide conflict taking place. It is clear from this seal that peace was established on a worldwide scale during the 1st seal because here peace is ***taken from the earth*** and ***men slay one another***. This is a time of war, internal strife and national strife on a global scale.

A great sword was given to him. A ***great sword*** is given to God's enemies so that they might destroy one another! This is God's enemies fighting among themselves, perhaps a power struggle. It is clear from the 1st and 2nd seals that they are not taking place at the same time. You cannot have peace and war at the same time. Peace comes first and then war. Thus, the first two seals do not happen at the same time.

The ***horse*** is described as ***fiery-red*** and represents the forces of warfare and bloodshed which ***take peace from the earth***. Horses are connected with war and conquest and the horsemen are associated with an omen of the end (Thomas). Worldwide peace was established temporarily but now it is taken away and in its place comes massive bloodletting on a worldwide scale. This is men fighting men as indicated by the phrase ***that men would slay one another***.

The ***great sword*** is a *machaira* which was a long sword that the Roman soldier carried in battle. It is associated in the Bible with distress, persecution, peril, famine, violent death, and war (Rom 8:35; Gen 31:26). The ***great sword*** is therefore a symbol of the massive bloodshed that will occur during the wars and rumors of wars that take place as a result of the breaking of the 2nd Seal.

C. The 3rd Seal: Famine (6:5-6)

Revelation 6:5 When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures

saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."

Famine is, interestingly, a result of war. Thomas says, "Under the second seal, the world has experienced widespread war. Hunger is one of the aftermaths of war." This also fits well with Jesus' Olivet Discourse when he mentioned famine after wars and rumors of war (cf Matt 24:7b). While the world has seen its share of famines it has never seen one like this.

As the ***third living creature*** says "***come***"...***a black horse*** appears ***and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand***. The ***black*** suggests a time of lamentation, sorrow, and mourning because of the scarcity of food which has resulted from worldwide warfare. The ***pair of scales*** measures the amount of money required to buy a certain amount of food during this time. Only the wealthy will have enough money to buy decent portions of nutritious food during the 3rd Seal.

Verse 6 says, ***And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."*** The ***voice in the center of the four living creatures*** must come from the throne of God and it is most likely the ***voice of God the Father*** since the Lamb is the one who breaks the seal and the Father's voice is mentioned again in 6:11.

What the Father announces is devastating, particularly to those who are economically poor. ***"A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."*** A measure of ***wheat*** was slightly less than a quart by dry measure. ***Wheat*** was the main food of the ancient world, a grain that was worth more than ***barley*** because it had more nutritional value. But this much ***wheat*** is only enough to feed a person for one day. How much then is a ***denarius***? A ***denarius*** is a full day's wage. So, ***a quart of wheat for a denarius*** translates into "work all day for a single meal". Second we have ***three measures of barley for a denarius***. ***barley*** was cheaper than ***wheat*** because it had less nutritional value. So, if you have a family during the Tribulation then you can work all day and earn a ***denarius*** and then go buy ***three measures of barley***. This will perhaps fill the tummy of your wife and children but it will not be near enough nutritional value. So, what we have here is a normal demand for food but economic inflation to the point that an entire days labor can only provide enough money to buy one meal with nutritional value. Thus, there will be many sleepless and hungry nights and people will begin to lose significant amounts of weight. Only those who are extremely wealthy will have enough money to enjoy a nutritional diet.

This last phrase has confused many people. God the Father says, *and do not damage the oil and wine*. *Oil and wine* are luxuries, they are not staple foods like wheat and barley. So, *oil and wine* will be plentiful and the price will not be high because their demand will be very low. People will want food, not *oil and wine*. The rich will, of course, still be able to live a life of luxury at this time because they have purchasing power to buy *wheat* or *barley* and *oil and wine* to accompany their meals. Thus, “The poor will have it extremely hard while the wealthy will experience no interruption to their luxurious lifestyle” (Thomas).

D. The 4th Seal: Death to ¼ of Human Population (6:7-8)

Revelation 6:7 When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." ⁸ I looked, and behold, a pale green horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

The *fourth living creature* summons the fourth horsemen. The intensity of this seal increases greatly. Following the war-mongers comes famine and here increased famine to the point of death as well as continued killing with the sword, death by pestilence or disease and wild beasts.

As with the first three seals this 4th Seal is described by Jesus in association with the “beginning of birth pangs” in Luke 21:11 under the word “plagues and famines”. This will be a time of unprecedented misery unlike any the world has yet to experience. Sure, there have been plagues and famines but nothing like this ever, this is global in scale and here the rich and the poor are included.

The horse is *pale-green* (*chloros*). It pictures the yellow-ish green of decay, the color of death. It pictures a corpse in the advanced stages of decay. “It is best to see the rider as a personification of death viewed comprehensively. Only death can have Hades as its inseparable companion” (Thomas). Why are Death and Hades mentioned together? Death refers to what happens to the physical body and Hades the place where departed spirits of unbelievers are sent.

The text seems to be saying that Death is riding the pale horse and Hades is following him on foot. “Hades...is on foot and apparently acts as death’s hearse, standing ready to engulf

and detain Death's victims (Alford; Scott; Beasley-Murray). Because the two are inseparable (cf Rev 1:18; 20:13, 14) (Swete; Mounce), Hades apparently is able to maintain the horse's pace so as to keep up with Death's movements" (Thomas).

The results of Death and Hades are beyond human comprehension. ¼ of the world's population is killed. According to the CIA, as of July 2005, the world population is 6,446,131,400 or we could just round that to 6.5 billion people.ⁱⁱⁱ For calculation sake let's just say world population was 6 billion.

$$\begin{array}{r} 6,000,000,000 \\ \times \quad \quad 0.25 \\ \hline 1,500,000,000 \end{array}$$

If we were in the Tribulation today Death and Hades would take the lives of 1.5 billion people. That would mean wiping out every person in Africa, North America, South America, and Australia. That would leave only Asia and Europe.^{iv}

Death and Hades are *given authority*. Who gives them the *authority*? God does. What does God give them the *authority* to do? *to kill with* four instruments:

1. *with sword*
2. *with famine*
3. *with pestilence*
4. *by the wild beasts of the earth*

With the *sword* means death by violent means, probably in warfare. People will grow desperate and will resort to war and bloodshed. With *famine* refers to an intensification of the famine under the 3rd Seal. Things will only grow worse economically and agriculturally. The *famine* will become so severe by this time that large numbers of people are starving to death. *With pestilence* refers to disease that is a result of warfare, death, and famine. With so many dead bodies lying around it is no wonder that disease will be rampant and will kill many. There will be no way for the remaining people on earth to bury all the bodies. Even mass burials will not be possible. Corpses will just lie in the streets and decay because there are too many dead to bury them. Lastly, Death and Hades are given the authority to kill by means of *the wild beasts of the earth*. Wild beasts will roam the earth searching for food and will prey on those who are weak and defenseless (cf **Dt 32:24**; 2 Kings 17:25; Jer 5:6; **Ezek 5:12-17**; **14:21**; **33:27**)

If at this point, you think this is as bad as it could possibly get, remember that our Lord said, “these are merely the beginning of birth pangs”. The intensity will increase as the following seal, trumpet and bowl judgments are released on the earth.

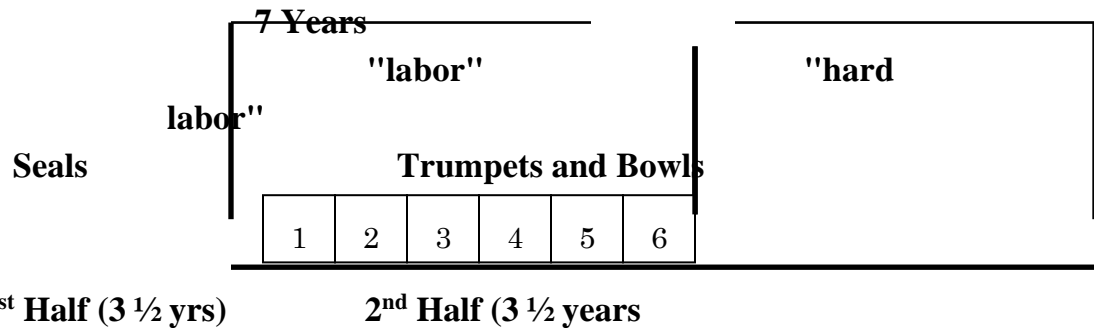
Review:

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70th Week of Daniel 9
2 Divisions of Birth Pangs

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- E. The Holiness of God
- F. The Sinfulness of Man
- G. The Satisfaction of Christ

ⁱ Some manuscripts read **“Come and see”** but this reading presupposes that John is the one who is being summoned. The context argues that it is the horse and rider that are being summoned as they are the one’s who come forth. Besides, John is seeing everything that transpires (cf. **“and I looked”** of v 1).

ii This may refer to the ultimate end-times antichrist; the one out of the many antichrists who will rise to the top and take the pre-eminence (2 Thess 2). If this is the case then the “day of the Lord” begins whenever the ultimate end-times antichrist has been revealed which would take place sometime during the 1st seal. However, it is more likely that the “day of the Lord” will begin with the 2nd Seal after the following sequence of events has taken place: 1) the apostasy (2 Thess 2:4), 2) 1st seal (Rev 6:1-2), 3) peaceful conquest (Rev 6:2), 4) peace on earth (Rev 6:4), 5) people will cry “peace and safety” (1 Thess 5:2), 6) restrainer removed (2 Thess 2:7), 7) man of lawlessness revealed (2 Thess 2:4), 8) day of the Lord begins with the 2nd seal (2 Thess 2:3-4; Rev 6:3-4).

iii <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html> exact number was 6,446,131,400.

iv In 1990, Continental Population was divided as follows, Asia being by far the most populated continent holding more than half the world’s population: Africa 620,765,054; North America 424,214,099; South America 296,629,686; Asia 3,187,617,673; Europe 721,208,170; Australia 26,557,527

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