

August 22, 2021

Revelations 6:1-8;7:9-17

**Children's message:** This morning we are introduced to the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. They are the ones who bring: pestilence, famine, destruction and death upon the earth. This is payback for people's sinfulness. Not very nice topics to be speaking about.

Remember a few weeks ago that I said these symbols have many meanings and that their meanings have changed over time. The image of the four horsemen is a great example of this. So where did the idea or image of the four horsemen come from? The prototype for the four horsemen comes from and first appears in Zachariah 1:8-17. The Divine messengers of God appear riding a horse. The color of the horse and the others may not actually symbolize anything in particular. Or that the original meaning has been lost in history. That does sometimes happen. The horse draws attention to the place where they are pastured. This is a fertile and peaceful place.

The horses form part of a heavenly troop. They are sent by God to patrol the earth. This is not a bad image. It is almost comforting that God sent them to keep an eye on us. Keep in mind that the image and idea of the horsemen was in the minds and imaginations of the Jews of Jesus's day. They would be familiar with the image.

Then comes John who takes the image of the horsemen and expands upon it. Now we have four horsemen. The color of the horses start to

take on a new meaning. The new image of the four horsemen is not to peacefully patrol the earth. John has taken the image of the four horsemen as a sign of the coming end. They are to unleash pestilence, famine, destruction and death. A very sharp contrast to the horsemen in Zachariah.

In the beginning of the last century if you mentioned the four horsemen it may be something completely different. In 1924, the four horsemen were: Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They were football players for Notre Dame. In the 80's and 90's the four horsemen were: Ric Flair, Ole and Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard. They were wrestlers in the NWA. As you can see the term the four horsemen has been repurposed. In the last century we have used it in sports and entertainment. John would be completely blown away by how we use this term today. There are pictures from 1924 of the Notre Dame four horsemen actually on horses in their football uniforms. Do a search and check it out.

**Adult's message:** This morning we get our first glimpse of the four horsemen. They are a fearful and imposing group of riders. John uses them to describe the sequence of events that will logically follow. This truly a message for the days and time it was written in. They could have a meaning for our times if the same conditions existed now as then.

The Lamb of God starts to open the seals on the scroll. John begins this chapter with a description of the signs of the end. Mathew talks about it in chapter 24:13, but not with the detail John provides us with. "And what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age."

The seals that are opened unleash the consequences of humanities behaviour. These conditions have existed since the start of the church and they will continue until the Lord's second coming. Keep in mind that at this time in history Jesus was coming back very soon. John is actually describing the socio-political atmosphere of his day. Then put an apocalyptic layer on top of it and you have the condition of their times.

Each horseman explains the logical sequence of events that will play out over time. The first rider on the white horse represents the spirit of conquest. Divine judgement that is brought about by military power and the victory over one's enemies. This rider is the liberator of God's people. Jesus told us that nations will rise against nations. So we should not be too surprised. The second rider is on a fiery red horse. This horse symbolizes war and violent bloodshed and death. This is the removal of peace from the earth. It is the result of the conquest of the first horse. The third rider is on a black horse. This represents famine and inflation. A frequent accompaniment to war. The fourth rider is on a pale horse. Sometimes it is translated as a green horse. This rider and horse represent death. Green was seen as the colour of rotting flesh. Pestilence and starvation follow the famine of war. This is what happens when two forces collide in war. Some think John was preparing the Christian communities for the aftermath of this war. Did he think this war would be physical, celestial or a combination of both?

The last two verses remind us of the theme of this book. Victory comes through sacrifice. Those who keep the faith and persist through the difficult persecutions will praise God in heaven. John describes the victorious church and the blessings of heaven. He records them to encourage and console the Christian communities of the day. The

heavenly life is described as an unending worship service. It is a place where all suffering has been eliminated. Take courage in your current suffering in this world. Things do get better in the next life.

John expands the image of the horsemen to four. He is trying to prepare the Christian communities for the trials that he sees coming. John encourages them to remain faithful to the Lord. Through their trials here they will be rewarded in the next life. Keep your eyes on the prize which is life in heaven with the Lamb of God.