

The Seven Seals

An explanation of
Revelation chapter 6:1-8

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Introduction

While introducing the prophecy of the seven seals, which commences in Revelation Chapter 6, it is helpful to review chapters 4 and 5, which provide the background to the prophecy.

In Revelation 4 God is revealed as the Creator seated upon the throne and in supreme control. In Revelation 5 Jesus Christ is brought to view as the omnipotent Lamb who has paid the price for the world's redemption and conquered Satan. The world's destiny is decided, the saints of God are guaranteed the kingdom and all who have rebelled against God are destined for destruction.

In the prophecy of the seven seals, the church of God is revealed as being in deadly conflict with the powers of darkness, and while error and apostasy appear to be in the ascendancy, God is still in control. Christ has the title deeds of the kingdom: the church is assured of final victory.

The four horsemen

The first four seals introduce the celebrated four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Many and varied attempts have been made to interpret the significance of these horsemen through the years, yet still today there remains much confusion concerning their meaning.

Confusing interpretations

The grand prophecies of the Book of Revelation always apply to the various aspects of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the conflict between the people of God and their oppressors. This overriding principle should also apply to this prophecy.

The problem with most interpretations of the four horsemen, however, is that they tend to apply the predictions to events that are either shallow or inconsequential. For example, applying the prophecy of the four horsemen to the popular interpretation of war, famine, pestilence, etcetera, lessens the impact of the prophecy as a whole. Why would holy writ preserve predictions of conditions that have been commonplace throughout history and which have little significance as far as the great controversy between good and evil is concerned?

A popular view - angelic agencies

A popular view at the current time amongst some scholars is that the horsemen represent angelic powers. This view is based on the Book of Zechariah, chapters 1:8-10 and 6:1-8. Zechariah 1 pictures three chariots: in colours of red, speckled and white. In chapter 6, four chariots are depicted of red, white and black, with bay horses harnessed in each chariot. In Scripture horses and chariots have invariably represented the angels of God.

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place. Psalm 68:17 KJV

In the seven seals however, the four entities are not horses and chariots, they are horsemen. It is crucial to our understanding that we recognize that *no* chariots are presented in this scenario. Therefore to employ the horses and chariots of Zechariah as a basis for this prophecy is not sound.

Moreover, in the Book of Revelation, angels are always referred to as literal beings rather than merely as symbols, particularly in the prophecy of the seven seals. In Revelation 5:2, 11 the angels are emphatically referred to as *angels*. In Revelation 7:1-2 the angels are again designated in literal terms - *four angels, holding the four winds*. In Revelation 7:11 *angels* render praise before the throne.

What then is the true significance of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse?

A Scriptural principle - the horse as spiritual warfare

First, following the basic law of interpretation of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, what does the Bible declare that a horse represents? The answer is found in Revelation itself. In Chapter 19 another white horse is brought to view: sometimes referred to as the fifth horseman of Revelation.

*And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. And he who sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he **judges and makes war**.*
Revelation 19:11

Here we see Jesus Christ at the Second Advent. It is a military picture, symbolic of Armageddon. Jesus is depicted riding a white horse. Why is this the case?

In righteousness He judges (or punishes) and makes war

A horse always denotes warfare: consequently this is a portrayal of war.

... and the armies in heaven... followed Him upon white horses. v14

Do the angels literally ride white horses when they descend to this planet at the Second Advent? They do not, rather what is presented here is a symbol of Armageddon – the last great conflict. Smith's Bible Dictionary – a scholarly and authoritative work - declares:

The most striking feature in the biblical notices of the horse is the exclusive application of it to warlike operations; in no instance is that useful animal employed for the purposes of ordinary locomotion or agriculture, if we except Isaiah 28:28.¹

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary likewise confirms this:

In contrast with the many texts that speak of the use of the horse for war, there is only one which mentions the horse in connection with agriculture.²

The figure of a horse, then, does not represent an angel but rather denotes physical conflict. Each horse of the Apocalypse, consequently, represents a particular kind of warfare. This phenomenon we will now examine.

¹ William Smith ed., "Horse", in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. (London, John Murray, 1893),

² Siegfried H. Horn et al, "Antipas", in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, Don. F. Neufield, ed. (Washington, Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1960), 490.

The white horse

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

In Scripture the colour white always denotes purity and righteousness.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Isaiah 1:18

This, then, is righteous warfare.

The horseman

Who, we may ask, is the rider of the white horse? To find the answer we need to go back to the Old Testament, because the Book of Revelation is based on Old Testament imagery and prophecy. The symbolism of this current application is drawn from the messianic 45th Psalm. In this Psalm, David predicts the coming of the Messiah as a mighty warrior and a conquering king. It perfectly parallels the description of the first horseman of Revelation. In fact there are five distinct parallels between Psalm 45 and Revelation 6:2. They are as follows.

Psalm 45	Revelation 6:2
v4 <i>In Your majesty ride prosperously</i>	He rides <i>a white horse</i>
v1 <i>I recite... concerning the king</i>	The rider has <i>crown upon his head</i> denoting kingship.
v4 <i>Ride prosperously because of truth, humility and righteousness.</i>	Rides a white horse denoting purity & righteousness.
v5 <i>Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies.</i>	<i>He that sat on him had a bow in his hand.</i> A bow is to shoot arrows, which represent the Word of God. Habakkuk 3:9
v5 <i>The peoples fall under you</i> indicates the triumph of the Messiah.	He <i>went forth conquering and to conquer.</i>

These five parallels reveal that the first horseman of Revelation 6 represents Jesus Christ engaging in a war of righteousness and purity.

The warriors

When was it that Jesus Christ waged such a war using the arrows of the Word of God? It was when He was physically upon earth. At the end of His earthly ministry, before He ascended to heaven, Jesus Christ commissioned His church to continue the battle here on earth with Satan and the powers of hell.

How does Christ's church on earth do battle with the forces of evil?

Put on the whole armour of God... for we ... wrestle (or war) against... powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:11-12 (margin)

Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 2:3

We do not war according to the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

This is a spiritual warfare. No physical weapons are legitimate in this battle, only the spiritual armaments that Christ has bequeathed to His church are to be employed by the faithful.

The Song of Solomon, recounting the church militant on earth, describes it as *terrible as an army with banners*. This is so true of the church when it is pure, faithful and obedient to Christ. The great hymn *Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching As To War* reflects this reality.

This warfare against evil is the greatest war ever staged: the greatest battle is against Satan and the powers of darkness. To wage this warfare, moral courage is required of the true Christian.

Prophecy fulfilled

After His ascension did the church of Christ go forth conquering and to conquer as He had commissioned it to do? It certainly did. In spite of the strength of paganism, established and protected within the surrounding nations, the gospel of Christ spread like fire in the stubble - and this in spite of the fierce persecution to which it was subjected. According to some authorities, two and half million Christians were done to death by pagan Rome, yet in spite of this sobering fact, five million converts were won to Christ in the first century of the Christian era. The apostle Paul declared of his day

The gospel... is preached to every creature under heaven. Colossians 1:23

Under the power of Pentecost the then known world heard the gospel. As the author of Great Controversy stated of those early years of the church

Under the fiercest persecution, these witnesses for Jesus kept their faith unsullied...they uttered no complaint...the great controversy in which the disciples of Jesus yielded up their lives, did not cease when these faithful standard-bearers fell at their post. By defeat they conquered. God's workmen were slain, but his work went steadily forward. The gospel continued to spread, and the number of its adherents to increase. It penetrated into regions that were inaccessible, even to the eagles of Rome...the subjects of Satan were leaving his service, and enlisting under the banner of Christ.³

What a marvelous picture this is! The first horseman went forth conquering and to conquer.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 41-42.

The words of the apostles were as sharp arrows of the Almighty, convicting men of their terrible guilt in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of glory.⁴

The arrows represent the Word of God and their effectiveness on the minds of men. Thus the prediction of the first horseman was faithfully fulfilled in the history of the church of the first century AD.

The red horse

Another horse fiery red went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given unto him a great sword. Revelation 6:3-4

Here is presented a different horse and rider: it indicates another kind of warfare.

Incorrect interpretations

It is claimed by some that the red horse represents God's activities on the earth and that the prediction that He would *take peace from the earth* was a fulfillment of Matthew 10:34-36. This claim must be rejected. Notice these words of Jesus:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. Matthew 10:34-36

This did not apply to the period of the red horse. Jesus' words were fulfilled under the *white horse* period when the church was pure and united and the gospel was powerfully proclaimed, resulting in great persecution. The red horse *takes peace from the earth* and the inhabitants turn to killing one another. In other words this horse brings disunity and discord into the church.

It is also claimed by some that the white horse continues to apply throughout the Christian era. However is this view correct? Did the church of Christ continue to conquer beyond the first century of the Christian era? The apostle Paul was shown very clearly that the church would not continue in triumph: it would be led astray.

For I know this, that after my departing (or death) savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember, that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:29-31

What a sad experience for the apostle to recount. After all he had endured while proclaiming the gospel and raising up churches, to learn that within the midst of these very churches false teachers and apostasy would arise and members of those fellowships would *speak perverse things*. This prediction was fulfilled: false teachers did arise and apostasy gradually developed within the church.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1911), 45.

A different method of attack

Ultimately, however, finding that persecuting the church only increased its growth, Satan resorted to a different method of attack

*Satan therefore laid his plans to **war** (notice, it involves warfare)... more successfully against the government of God. The great adversary now endeavored to gain by artifice what he had failed to secure by force. Persecution ceased, and in its stead were substituted the dangerous allurements of temporal prosperity and worldly honor... now the church was in fearful peril... **most** of the Christians at last consented to lower their standard, and a union was formed between Christianity and paganism... the foul leaven of idolatry, thus brought into the church, continued its baleful work. Unsound doctrines, superstitious rites and idolatrous ceremonies were incorporated into her faith and worship. As the followers of Christ united with idolaters, the Christian religion became corrupted, and the church lost her purity and power.⁵*

What a sad picture to witness when the vast majority of Christians apostatized from the true faith. Just as red denotes sinfulness, this is the apostasy that the red horse signified.

Though your sins be as scarlet.... Isaiah 1:18.

After the death of the apostles the church became sin-filled. An internal war was mounted against the doctrines and standards of the church.

Power was given him (the rider) to take peace from the earth.

Those who endeavored to uphold true doctrine and remain faithful to Christ were reviled and proscribed. One writer declares of the period:

As long as persecution continued, the church remained comparatively pure. But as it ceased, converts were added who were less sincere and devoted, and the way was opened for Satan to obtain a foot-hold...

*These apostate Christians, uniting with their half-pagan companions, directed their **warfare** against the most essential features of the doctrines of Christ... the doctrine of religious freedom was termed heresy and its upholders were hated and proscribed.⁶*

Peace was truly taken from the earth - as far as the church was concerned in particular. There was fierce conflict between truth and error within the faith and this fact is confirmed by recognized church historians.

Mosheim:

There was continual war and trouble.⁷

Edward Gibbon:

⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 42-43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁷ J.L. Mosheim, *Historical Commentaries on the State of Christianity* (New York: S. Converse, 1853), Quoted in Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1881), 485

*The bands of civil society were torn asunder by the fury of religious factions.*⁸

Gregory Nazianzen:

*The kingdom of heaven (the church) was converted by discord into the image of chaos of a nocturnal tempest and of hell itself.*⁹

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea:

*We sunk into negligence and sloth, envying and reviling in different ways, and were almost on the point as it were of taking up arms against each other. Prelates inveighing prelates... hypocrisy and dissimulation had risen to the greatest heights of malignity. Pastors deserting the law of piety were inflamed against each other, accumulating threats, rivalry, hostility and hatred.*¹⁰

Thus was the second period of the church designated by the red horse. What a contrast to the period of the white horse. During this period pagans, as they observed the Christians' fervency, purity and unity had cried *See how they love one another*. During the period of the red horse, however, they would have said, *See how they hate one another*. Peace was surely taken from the church.

The great sword

There was given him a great sword

What does this sword represent?

There are three applications in scripture which apply to the sword.

- It symbolizes authoritarianism: civil power – the magistrate, the state etc.
- It implies division and separation.
- It stands for retribution, war and slaughter.

Only the first two applied during the red horse period. A spirit of authoritarianism came into the church; its leadership becoming preoccupied with a love of position and a thirst for power. Even in the days of John, the last of the apostles, this antichristian spirit was entering the church.¹¹

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. 3 John 9-10.

⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1789), 3:88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:732.

¹⁰ C.F. Cruse, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus* (New York: Swords Stanford & Co, 1833), 318.

¹¹ Authoritarianism or civil power: Romans 13:1-5;
Division and separation: Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 10:34;
Retribution, war and slaughter: Jeremiah 12:12; 25:30-33;

As one author declared,

*But as persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and his apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions.*¹²

Speaking of Constantine the Great, the Roman Emperor who endeavoured to unite the church, the same author says

*He was urged to do this by the bishops of the church, who were inspired by ambition and thirst for power....*¹³

Again

*When the early church became corrupted by departing from the simplicity of the gospel... in order to control the consciences of the people, she sought the support of the secular power....*¹⁴

This was *the great sword*. McClintock and Strong writing of this period of church history state

*Men exalted in the scale of the society, were eager to extend the power which had been entrusted to them. And they sought to do so by exacting from the people, acquiescence in the peculiar doctrines that they chose to publish as articles of faith.*¹⁵

Division and dissension

But the sword also implies division and separation. Was there division and dissension during this period?

*It required a desperate struggle for those who would be faithful to stand firm against the deceptions and abominations which were disguised in sacerdotal garments and introduced into the church.... After a long and severe **conflict**, the faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church if she still refused to free herself from falsehood and idolatry.... If unity could be secured only by the compromise of truth and righteousness, then let there be **difference**, and even **war**.*¹⁶

As shown above, there was warfare and conflict. Unfortunately some who were determined to be loyal to the truth, to be faithful, did at times use physical force themselves in contravention of the instruction of Christ. The red horse then, symbolizes the emergence of the apostate church. The true church was under attack, especially in

¹² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 49.

¹³ Ibid. 53.

¹⁴ Ibid. 433.

¹⁵ J.S. John McClintock, "Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature", in ed. (New York, Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1897), , Richard Watson, "A Biblical and Theological Dictionary", in ed. (New York, Lane & Scott, 1849), 741.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 45.

regard to its doctrines and standards of behaviour. The majority of the Orthodox Church had become sinful, heretical and political.

The black horse

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see". So I looked, and behold a black horse. And he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. Revelation 6:5

Black is opposite to white, indicating that it is the opposite of all that purity and righteousness stands for.

Here is pictured the third period of the orthodox Christian Church. It suggests a period of unrighteousness - of moral darkness, of error and of apostasy. Was this, in fact, what happened? Did this condition befall the established church of the day? Did the official Christian church sink deeper into apostasy?

Baptised paganism

During this period Christianity's growing popularity placed it at great peril. The beginning of the decline began with the conversion of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, around 300 AD. He never became a true, heartfelt Christian, he merely affected a bogus conversion to Christianity in order to secure the unity of his empire. One of Constantine's cynical gambits to persuade pagans to embrace Christianity was the offer of a white garment and twenty pieces of gold as a material reward for converting from paganism. In response, the pagans swarmed into the rivers and were baptised into the Christian faith. The lower classes were particularly susceptible to this form of bribe. In one year alone in Rome, 12,000 men were baptised plus a proportionate number of women and children.¹⁷

The result saw paganism stream into the church. The pagan rites and ceremonies that are now found in both the Church of Rome and many Protestant churches are due to this faux evangelistic outreach.¹⁸

*The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. Now the work of corruption rapidly progressed. Paganism, while appearing to be vanquished, became the conqueror. Her spirit controlled the church. Her doctrines, ceremonies, and superstitions were incorporated into the faith and worship of the professed followers of Christ. This compromise between paganism and Christianity resulted in the development of the "man of sin" foretold in prophecy as opposing and exalting himself above God. That gigantic system of false religion is a masterpiece of Satan's power - a monument of his efforts to seat himself upon the throne to rule the earth according to his will."*¹⁹

¹⁷ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1920 ed) 2:354-5.

¹⁸ John C Woodhouse, *The Apocalypse, or Revelation of St John*. (London: J Hatchard, 1905), 146.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 50

During this period the great apostasy had fully developed and the apostate Roman Church was now well established. The church historian, John Dowling states

*There is scarcely anything which strikes the mind of the careful student of church history with greater surprise than the comparatively early period at which many of the corruptions of Christianity which were embodied in the Romish system took their rise.*²⁰

This fact can be proved unequivocally. The Church of Rome often claims, "We go back to the apostles." While it is true that they may trace their lineage back, it is via the black and the red horses. This church only reaches back to the apostolic church through the serpentine trajectory of corrupt beliefs and willful apostasy. The Church of Rome is in reality a breakaway from the true faith – and consequently qualifies as apostate.

It is significant that the form of paganism that corrupt Christianity primarily subsumed at this time was Babylonian sun worship which had revived during Persian dominion. The sun, under the name of Mithra, was worshipped and the belief was called Mithraism. This was the most significant form of paganism which amalgamated with apostate Christianity. Roman Catholic authorities freely acknowledge that this was the case.

*In her work of Christianising the world, the Catholic Church adapts herself as far as possible to her surroundings. She does not reject completely the customs or institutions of a people whose land she enters, but she endeavours to bring these institutions into harmony with her own doctrines. So it comes, we find the early writers of the Roman Catholic church retaining in substance the old myths and legends – changing them only to invest them with a Christian atmosphere.*²¹

There are many other authorities who could be quoted to demonstrate that this has been the continued practice of the Church of Rome down through the years.²²

It was during this period that Sunday observance was established in the church. Mithraism celebrated the Day of the Sun as its chief day of the week – needless to say that day was Sunday. Authorities are very clear that it was at this time that the observance of Sunday was established in the orthodox church and took the place of the true seventh-day Sabbath. Dr. G. Murray of Oxford University wrote,

*Mithraism had so much acceptance that it was able to impose on the Christian world its own Sunday in place of the Sabbath, its sun's birthday December 25 as the birthday of Jesus.*²³

Numerous other statements by historians also show that Sunday came from Mithraism and entered the church during the period of the black horse.²⁴

²⁰ John Dowling, *History of Romanism* (New York: Edward Walker, 1845), 2:65.

²¹ *Catholic Educational Review* (Washington, Catholic Education Press) March, 1921.

²² Andre Retif, "Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism", in ed. (New York, Hawthorn Books, 1962), 85

²³ Murray G Dr, *Christianity In the Light of Modern Knowledge* pp 73-74.

²⁴ H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (London: George Newnes Ltd, 1920), 590.

Arthur E. Weigall, *Paganism in our Christianity* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1928), 145.

G.J. Laing, *Survivals of Roman Religion* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), 148.

The scales

He had a pair of scales in his hands...

What would these scales (or balances) represent? In Scripture they have three applications:²⁵

- commerce
- corrupt dealing
- judgment.

All three aptly characterise the period of the black horse.

Commerce

The Papal church now began to engage in the commercialisation of religion. People were led to believe that it was essential to pay for the benefits of salvation. It wasn't enough for you to be baptised, you also had to provide money to the church to gain acceptance. Once you were confirmed in the faith you also had to make further payments. When you were married you had to part with more of your livelihood. To receive forgiveness from the priest you also had to pay to ensure absolution. Whenever you buried a loved one you had to pay the church. When masses were said to secure a loved one from purgatory, you had to pay for the privilege. Commerce became a source of tremendous income for the apostate church.²⁶

Corrupt dealing

The scales in the vision also represent corrupt dealings. The most striking evidence of this corruption throughout the Dark Ages was the sale of relics. In fact some of the most outrageous claims were made in regard to relics: including the claim many ancient bones were of so-called dead saints. These relics were used to attract the populace to the churches.

Today, in some Catholic centres, you can still see purported holy relics on display. In Milan Cathedral are twelve vials which supposedly contain the fingers of the twelve apostles preserved in spirits. In St. Marks in Venice there are supposed to exist eight pieces of the cross, two thorns from Christ's crucifixion crown, some of Christ's blood in a vial, a nail from the cross, a lock of the Virgin Mary's hair, a bone from St. Paul's leg, a bone from St. Matthew's leg, a bone from St. Philip's leg, a bone from St. Peter's leg, a finger and a tooth from Mark, a piece of John the Baptist's head and a piece of Stephen's backbone.

While in London in 1956 the author spent some time with a Catholic priest who was in the process of departing his church. The author queried the priest on a number of things,

Arthur P. Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1862), 6:15

F. Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (Chicago: Open Court, 1903), 4.

²⁵ In Scripture, balances symbolise Commerce 15 times, Corrupt dealing twice and Judgement once.

²⁶ Johann Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History* (London: William Tegg, 1867), bk2, Pt2, ch3.
Charles Chiniquy, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* (TBA: Protestant Literature Depository, 1886), ch25.
Christian Edwardson, *Facts of Faith* (Nashville TN: Southern Publishing Assn, 1943), 162-172.

including the significance of relics to the Catholic faithful. Did the priests really believe these relics were the bones of the dead saints? The priest confirmed that the Catholic clergy generally didn't believe that these were genuine relics. He added that in fact many of the venerated relics were merely the bones of dead dogs. The magnitude of the fraud! What corrupt and deceptive dealings were perpetrated in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Describing the relics that were held in Canterbury Cathedral before the Protestant Reformation G.R. Balene wrote,

But Canterbury eclipsed them all in the splendour of its relics. Round the shrine of St. Thomas were 12 complete skeletons of canonised saints – three skulls, four arms and 300 thighs, thumbs, teeth and jawbones. Here too, was part of the Bethlehem manger and of the virgin's bed and the table of the last supper. Here was Aaron's rod that budded and more marvelous still, the actual clay out of which God had moulded Adam.²⁷

Fraud on the part of the Church was evidenced in the promises which were made to parishioners once they looked upon the relics. This simple act supposedly led to a promised remission from purgatory for lengthy periods of time, up to thousands of years. How Catholic congregations have been misled through the years!

Judgment

The third application of the scales is that of judgment.

You have been weighed in the balances and are found wanting. Daniel 5:27.

During the period of the black horse the Church of Rome's cup of apostasy was filled to the brim. It was judged and found wanting, and after much of God's patience and after many warnings, this apostate church was finally rejected.

Popery had become the world's despot...but the noon of the papacy was the midnight of the world...the condition of the world under the Romish power presented a fearful and striking fulfillment of the words of the prophet Hosea... "because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee".²⁸

Spiritual famine

I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, "A quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius"... Revelation 6:6

Wheat and barley were the staple food products of that time. The denarius was approximately equal in value to a labourer's daily wage. This vision portrays the cost of basic foodstuffs as exorbitant: the food represented as approximately ten times normal price. In other words, food was in short supply. This indicates a famine was abroad in the land – but was it a literal famine or a spiritual famine? We can say it signifies a spiritual famine – a dire lack of the Word of God. The apostate church created this famine because the Bible was taken away from the common people.

²⁷ George R Balleine, *A Layman's History of the Church of England* (London: Longmans, 1913), 47-49.

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 60.

*In order for Satan to maintain his sway over men, and establish the authority of the papal usurper, he must keep them in ignorance of the Scriptures. The Bible would exalt God, and place finite men in their true position; therefore its sacred truths must be concealed and suppressed.*²⁹

The leaders of the church began to lock up the scriptures in Latin rather than the dialects the general populations could understand: only the few who understood Latin had access to biblical truths. Bible knowledge consequently began to wane amongst the common parishioners. As a result error increased and superstition soon took over, enslaving the minds of men. Thus began what is termed the Dark Ages. And how dark they were!

The oil and the wine

Notice what the living creature declared in connection with the church period represented by the black horse:

... do not harm the oil and the wine. v6

In Scripture, *oil* represents the Holy Spirit. Some believe that oil not only represents the Holy Spirit but also the righteousness of Christ.³⁰ And it is true that when one receives the Holy Spirit, the Spirit does impart the righteousness of Christ. Wine represents doctrine. Unfermented wine represents true doctrines from the Word of God while intoxicating wine represents false doctrine, corrupted by Satan and his minions.

Is it true to claim that in the period of the black horse, the Holy Spirit and true doctrine disappeared? Was the righteousness of Christ still available to those who desired it? It was: God decreed, *Do not harm the oil and the wine*. In other words, don't let them disappear: make sure they are preserved.

When the apostate church began to dominate the world, God still preserved small remnants of people who had in their possession the precious Word of God in all its purity. The Waldenses of Northern Italy were one such group. They possessed the Word of God in their native tongue. In this way the Holy Spirit, the righteousness of Christ and correct doctrine were preserved. The gospel of salvation was still available to men and women if they should seek it.³¹

The pale horse

I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hades (or the grave) followed with him. And power was given unto them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. Revelation 6:8

²⁹ Ibid., 52.

³⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Boise, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1962), 61, 234.

³¹ J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1878), 1:18-58; 2:430-467. Also see Appendix A for a refutation of the claim by some that the oil and the wine represent certain people.

What is the colour which is implied by the term *pale*? Does this progression to *pale* represent an improved circumstance over the domain of the *black* horse? Is this a return toward the whiteness of purity and of righteousness? Note the following scholarly interpretations of this term *pale*:

*Pale – green, pale, sallow.*³²

*The colour pale or livid is that deadly greenish hue which is the unmistakable token of the approach of death.*³³

*...a horse, sickly green in colour.*³⁴

*... a pale green horse...*³⁵

*The greenish colour which appears on a corpse when decomposition begins. The Greek medical writers used the term to denote a pale or bilious complexion. Two versions translate it as 'pallidus', whence our word 'pallid'.*³⁶

This is how the official, orthodox church of the period appeared in the sight of heaven during the fourth period of the Christian era. The colour of the horse depicts corruption and suggests decomposition. It implies God's revulsion against the state the official church of the time.

Political supremacy of the church

Death rode the horse during the era of the pale horse. The established church of Rome predominated and in that dark, apostate period, spiritual death reigned supreme. The church was revealed in all its corruption and repulsiveness.

In 538 AD, the commencement of this appalling period, church leaders assumed a new authority. They were accepted as rulers of state agencies whereas previously they were considered to be concerned only with spiritual matters³⁷. The political power gained in 538 AD rapidly increased until the church oppressed all of Europe. As Dr. James Wylie accurately declared

*...the noonday of the papacy was the midnight of the world.*³⁸

³² James Strong, "The New Complete Dictionary of Bible Words", in ed. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), , Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 729.

³³ Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), , Rev. Boyd Carpenter, "The Revelation of St. John", in *Ellicott's Bible Commentary* Charles J. Ellicott, ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 86.

³⁴ J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1959), Revelation 6:8.

³⁵ The New English Translation (NET), <http://bible.org/netbible/index.htm> (accessed 9 October, 2010), Revelation 6:8.

³⁶ Gwynne Dalrymple, "The Church Turns Black", *Signs of the Times* 69, No. 37 (22 September, 1942), 8.

³⁷ B. Monod, *A Medieval History of Europe* (New York: H.Holt & Co, 1902), 120.

³⁸ J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* 1:16.

There was *literal* death for dissenters from the church when millions of true believers were done to death.³⁹ And there was spiritual death for the congregations of the great apostate church.

Today we need to be aware of the fact that the Dark Ages have been whitewashed. Catholic historians have been granted permission by their church to falsify history in order to hide the awful guilt of their church. The Dark Ages are now painted as an era of chivalry, peace and stability.⁴⁰ ⁴¹ However both Catholic and non-Catholic historians of earlier centuries have recorded the slaughter of millions for the crime of dissent against the “Mother” church.⁴²

It may interest the reader to note the testimony of the renowned 19th century Anglican preacher, scholar and author, Dr. Gratton Guinness:

It was in the early part of the year 1870, that I crossed the Pyrenees on my way from France to Spain... On reaching Madrid I went with Mr. William Green, the friend and biographer of Matamoros, to see the newly opened Quemadero. Some workmen employed in cutting a road across the summit of a low hill close to the city had inadvertently dug into a broad bank of ashes, which had been buried for one or two centuries.

Mingled with the ashes they had found a large quantity of charred human bones, together with fragments of rusted iron, and melted lead. The spot was speedily verified as the famous Quemadero, or place of burning, one of twelve places where so called “heretics” were annually burned in Spain, during the reign of the Inquisition.

I found the road had been cut through the centre of this bank of blackened bones and ashes. The strange stratum displayed seemed about six feet in depth, and covered quite a large area. There, then, exposed to the light of day were the ashes of Spanish martyrs. I stood in silence and looked at the ghastly monument. I had seen before, not a little Romanism on the continent, and in other countries, and had read of the multitude of martyrs who had suffered cruel deaths in past centuries at the hand of Spanish priests and inquisitors, on account of their faith in the pure gospel of the grace of God, and their opposition to Popish superstitions and idolatries. Now, for the first time, I found myself face to face with a terrible demonstration of the truth of these histories.

There, lying before me were the bones and ashes of Spanish confessors and martyrs who had suffered death at the stake. I could examine, and satisfy myself of their character. I could handle them, and did. Reverently I removed some burnt

³⁹ John Dowling, *History of Romanism* 541-542.

⁴⁰ W.E.H. Lecky, *History of Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (London: Longman Green & Co, 1866), 2:32.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: a concise translation* (Grand Rapids MI: Christian Classics, 1991), 2a, 2ae, qu. xi art. III

Andrew Steinmetz, *History of the Jesuits* (London: Richard Bentley, 1848), 1:13.

Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (London: W. Baynes & Son, 1825), 1:Preface XIII.

⁴² Charles Herbermann et al, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (The Catholic Encyclopedia Inc, 1922), 8:34.

⁴¹ *A Collection of the Decretals of Gregory IX* (Charles Herbermann et al, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 4:671).

*bones from the general mass, and wrapped them, together with a quantity of ashes, in a Spanish newspaper which I still possess, bearing the date of that day.*⁴³

The author of the book “The Great Controversy” stated

*Persecution opened upon the faithful with greater fury than ever before, and the world became a vast battlefield. For hundreds of years the church of Christ found refuge in seclusion and obscurity... The accession of the Roman Church to power marked the beginning of the Dark Ages. As her power increased, the darkness deepened... Those were days of peril for the church of Christ. The faithful standard-bearers were few indeed. Though the truth was not left without witnesses, yet at times it seemed that error and superstition would wholly prevail, and true religion would be banished from the earth.*⁴⁴

In this period

*... was established the most terrible of all engines of the papacy – the Inquisition. The prince of darkness wrought with the leaders of the papal hierarchy... the mangled forms of millions of martyrs cried to God for vengeance upon that apostate power.*⁴⁵

Four types of death

Death indeed rode the pale horse and the grave truly followed with him. Four types of death are listed by which the apostate church dealt with dissenters.

... with sword and with hunger and with death and by the beasts of the earth. v8

Notice the recurring significance of *four* here: four horsemen, the fourth part of the earth and four methods of killing. Four denotes universality and it represents the apparent total supremacy of the false church during that period of history.

The four methods of killing were with the sword, hunger, death and the beasts of the earth. The *sword* implies warfare, and warfare often produces *hunger* due to destruction of crops. *Death* here may denote pestilence (refer to the Greek “thanatos”).

While the prediction was literally fulfilled in the first three methods of killing, with regard to *the beasts of the earth* – there appears to be no evidence on record that God’s people were so martyred at that time. However this does not necessarily mean that it did not occur. One commentary suggests that *when pestilence has taken its toll, human society is so weakened that it cannot protect itself against the inroads of wild beasts.*⁴⁶

The four methods of killing may also have a symbolic interpretation where the *sword* referred to the crusades. At that time significant crusades were inspired and led by the church against millions of dissenters. *Hunger* may denote spiritual hunger due to lack of

⁴³ Henry Grattan Guinness, *History Unveiling Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co 1905), 393-397.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 54.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁶ F.D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Washington DC, Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1957), 7:777.

the Word of God. *Pestilence* may represent false doctrine. Finally, the wild beasts may well refer to *wolves in sheep's clothing* - the priests and friars of the day.

The fourth part of the earth

...power was given to them over a fourth of the earth...

The church's influence at that time extended over approximately one quarter of the then known world.

Some commentators claim that the pale horse period applies to the last days. Unfortunately, however, Babylon's domination of the last days will not just be over a fourth part of the earth – it will be worldwide.

..all the world marveled and followed the beast. Revelation 13:3

And all who dwell on the earth will worship him... Revelation 13:8

These statements indicate that Babylon is to be a worldwide power. The pale horse era matches the Dark Ages of church supremacy when the noonday of the apostate church was indeed the midnight of the world.

Why did God permit the false church to reign?

In the light of these terrible facts of history, why was it that God permitted the reign of the Antichrist? How could Heaven permit such awful tribulation to fall upon God's people? This deserves consideration: there are two probable reasons.

The first possible reason was that this dispensation revealed to the whole intelligent universe the true character of Satan's kingdom. God permitted Satan to set up his kingdom on earth originally in order to allow the universe to determine whether Satan's claims about the injustice of God were valid. The reign of the Antichrist during the Dark Ages enabled the universe to behold the fearful outworking of Satan's principles through the cruel and bloody history of the false church.

That gigantic system of false religion is a masterpiece of Satan's power, a monument of his efforts to seat himself upon the throne to rule the earth according to his will. ⁴⁷

The second reason is both sad and essential. The reason God permitted Rome to prevail over His people was in order to preserve the Christian faith, to preserve the purity of the gospel, and to preserve the sanctity of His church. History confirms the sad fact that affluence corrupts the church and begets apostasy. On the other hand adversity purifies the church and preserves the faith.

Conclusion

This concludes the first section of the seven seals prophecy. To summarise, the four horsemen of the first four seals represent four phases of spiritual warfare.

1. A righteous war by Christ and His people against the powers of evil.

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 50.

2. A war against the doctrines and standards of God's church.
3. A war against the character and leadership of God's church.
4. A war against the people of God's church.

The final three seals will be explained in the next topic: *Silence in heaven*.

Appendix A

The oil and the wine

The following statement from the Spirit of Prophecy is interpreted by some to mean that *the oil and the wine* represent certain people in the church.

He who would reform others must first reform himself. He must obtain the spirit of his Master and be willing, like Him, to suffer reproach and to practice self-denial. In comparison with the worth of one soul, the whole world sinks into insignificance. A desire to exercise authority, to lord it over God's heritage will, if indulged, result in the loss of souls. Those who really love Jesus will seek to conform their own lives to the Pattern and will labor in His spirit for the salvation of others.

In order to secure man to Himself and ensure his eternal salvation, Christ left the royal courts of heaven and came to this earth, endured the agonies of sin and shame in man's stead, and died to make him free. In view of the infinite price paid for man's redemption, how dare any professing the name of Christ treat with indifference one of His little ones?

*How carefully should brethren and sisters in the church guard every word and action lest they hurt the oil and the wine! How patiently, kindly, and affectionately should they deal with the purchase of the blood of Christ! How faithfully and earnestly should they labor to lift up the desponding and the discouraged! How tenderly should they treat those who are trying to obey the truth and have no encouragement at home, who have constantly to breathe the atmosphere of unbelief and darkness!*⁴⁸

At first glance it appears that *the oil and the wine* is applied to *His little ones, the despondent and discouraged*, those trying to obey the truth and who have no encouragement at home.

This interpretation of the Spirit of Prophecy statement appears to conflict with normal Bible interpretation. If the above is how the Spirit of Prophecy uses the phrase, perhaps it is taking it out of context and employing the phrase in a homiletic manner.

On the other hand, could it be that the Spirit of Prophecy is warning us to take care of those who are immature, or in discouraging circumstances, lest by our lack of sympathy and understanding they be led to look upon the truth of God – the righteousness of Christ and true doctrine - *the oil and wine* - in an unfavorable light and give up their faith? This would certainly be *hurting the oil and the wine*. This view harmonises with normal Biblical interpretation.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), 5:614-615.

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