

Revelation 6.1-8.1: Opening the Seals

6.1-17: The First Six Seals

6.1-8: The Four Horsemen

Zechariah 1.7-11; 6.1-8; also Jeremiah 15.2; Ezekiel 5.12

The Lamb opens a seal and one of the four living creatures speaks: 'Come!'

Common themes: captivity, sword, famine, death

'God is allowing the depravity of men to come full circle.' (O'Donovan 1986: 71-73)

Living Creatures:

- Lead heavenly worship (4.8-9; 5.8-10, 14; 19.4)
- Form an inner group in the throne retinue (4.6; 5.6, 11; 7.11; 14.3)
- Implement divine judgment (6.1, 3, 5-7; 15.7)

6.1-2: The First Horseman – White: Lust for Conquest

Description closely resembles the Parthians, the only military force in the ancient world feared by the Romans after defeating them in 55 B.C. and A.D. 62. A warlike federation of tribes east of the Euphrates, they were famous cavalry fighters who could shoot accurately from the horse.

'conquering and to conquer' – an idiom that stresses that the figure's supreme activity and purpose is military conquest

Jesus? Revelation 19.11-16

6.3-4: The Second Horseman – Red: War

God allows human depravity to come full circle. Here, the lust for conquest turns to civil war, utterly self-destructive.

Pyrros: 'Fiery red' – symbolizes the bloodshed and slaughter he brings

The rider is allowed to do three things:

1. Take peace from the earth
2. Cause people to kill one another
3. Use the sword for murderous destruction

Mark 13.7-8: "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains."

'slay' – *sphaxousin* – 'to slaughter'

6.5-6: The Third Horseman – Black: Famine

'and I looked'

The black horse signifies the sorrow and mourning caused by the famine and suffering that follow war. (Osborne 279)

'pair of scales' – purpose of scales in the ancient world was to ensure justice.

Proverbs 16.11: 'Honest scales and balances are from the LORD'

Here, they likely remind the reader of the exorbitant prices caused by famine and severe food shortages.

'a quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius' - Wheat and barley were the essential staples in the Roman world. A quart would represent food for one day for one person. These prices were 10-12 times the rate in first century Asia Minor (Mounce 1998: 144 cites Cicero *Verr.* 3.81)

In A.D. 90, there was a food shortage, and Emperor Domitian decreed that half the vineyards in Asia Minor be cut down and replaced with grain. The furor was so great that the Emperor rescinded the order.

6.6-7: The Fourth Horseman – Pale Green: Disease

The color of disease and death.

Death followed by Hades – death by plague.

'one-fourth of the earth'

Ezekiel 14.21: 'How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments – sword and famine and wild beasts and plague?'

6.9-11: Fifth Seal – The Martyred Saints

Ezekiel 40-48

'souls under the alter' – akin to 'blood under the alter' from the Brazen/Bronze altar at the temple (Exodus 27.9-19, 29.10-14; Leviticus 4.3-12)

Abel cried out from the ground – Genesis 4.10; also Romans 12.19; Luke 18.7-8; Psalm 79.10

White robe – high social status in 1C; purity and holiness

6.12-14: Sixth Seal – Shaking of the Heavens