

As we return to our study in the book of Revelation, remember... who it is that opens the seals of the scroll...it is the Lamb (Jesus Christ)... who was slain... and who now lives forever.

Remember... the Lamb (Jesus Christ)... who was slain is the Ruler of heaven and earth.

And in this present time, he rules in the midst of his enemies.

The Triune God has purposefully chosen to carry on his mission of rescue in this context.

Remember... it is the Lamb (Jesus Christ)... who directs the flow of history in order to bring about the good purposes of the Father.

Remember.... as each of the first four seals were opened by the Lamb (Jesus Christ)... the four living creatures, each in turn, said in a voice like thunder, "Come!"

Remember... the four living creatures are angelic beings, who represent the creation, and here in Revelation 6, they give voice to creation's cry to be...

Romans 8:19-22

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be **liberated from its bondage to decay** and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

... by speaking in a voice like thunder, "Come... Lord Jesus."

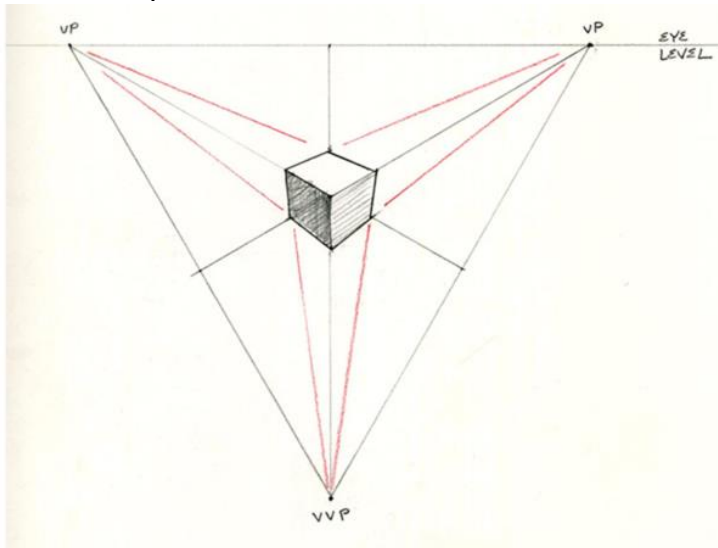
What the creation and the church eagerly anticipate is that moment when, as Revelation 11:15 says, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."

Remember...things are not as they seem.

There is more to reality than what we can see, hear, touch, taste and smell.

The book of Revelation reveals this more to the reader.

Remember... the emphasis made through the vision... of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls.



Tom Wright says, "The reader is given three different angles of vision on the same highly complex reality." p.63.

What is that highly complex reality?

It is the surprising manner by which God has chosen to operate in this fallen world.

The vision of the first four seals...the vision of the four horse riders who go out into the world, gives us understanding of God's ways in this present time.

It is here we need to place another passage of scripture alongside today's passage.

## **Matthew 24:3-8**

<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of birth pains.

Wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, famines, and earthquakes are what?

"The beginning..."

We need to hold Jesus' words clearly in our minds as we work with today's passage.

### **The first rider**



What are we told about this rider? **Read v.2.**

He rides a white horse.

He holds a bow.

He was given a crown.

He rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

Revelation 19:11 portrays Jesus riding a white horse.

Is this first rider Jesus?

I believe carefully looking at the scripture will help us answer this question.

There are significant differences between the rider of chapter six and the rider of chapter nineteen.

- The rider in chapter six is given a crown.  
The rider in chapter nineteen has on his head many crowns.
- The rider in chapter six is said to be bent on conquest.  
The rider in chapter nineteen goes out to enact God's justice.
- The weapon of the rider in chapter six is a bow.  
The rider in chapter nineteen has a sword coming out of his mouth.
- The rider in chapter six is unnamed.  
The rider in chapter nineteen is identified as "the Word of God," and the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."
- The rider in chapter six goes out, into the world... on his own.  
The rider in chapter nineteen is accompanied by the armies of heaven.

Look again at Revelation 6:1.

Where is the Lamb when he opens the first seal?

Look back at 5:6a.

As Jesus opened the seal he is in heaven, at the center of the throne.

Where is the Lamb when he opens the remaining six seals?

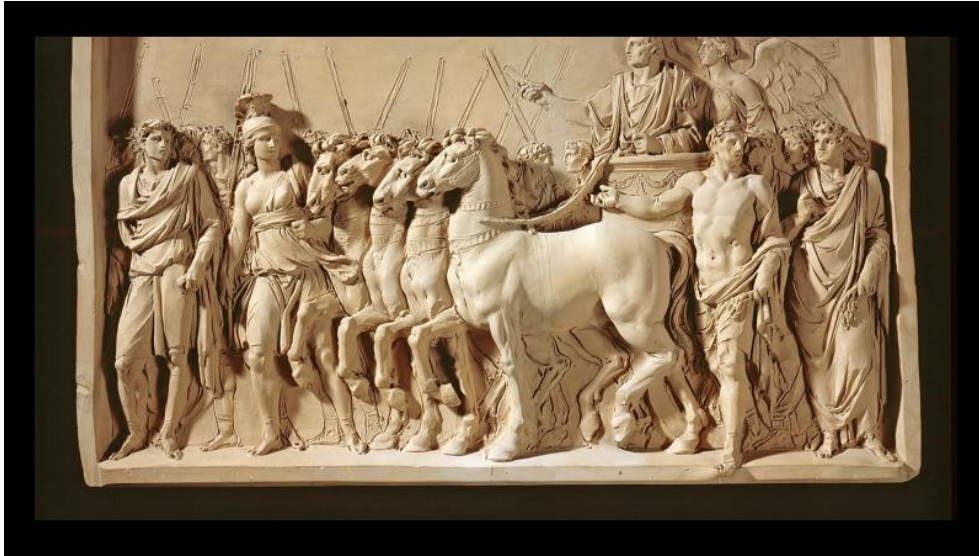
Has he moved?

No, he is still at the center of the throne.

The Lamb remains in heaven, while each rider goes out into the earth.

If the first rider is not Jesus, then who is he?





Albert Barnes writes:

In the triumphs granted by the Romans to their victorious generals, after a procession composed of musicians, captured princes, spoils of battle, etc., came the conqueror himself, seated on a high chariot drawn by four white horses, robed in purple, and wearing a wreath of laurel.

<https://www.studylight.org/commentary/revelation/6-2.html>

With this understanding, we see represented in the white horse and its rider a **regular feature of human history**... that of kings and nations bent on conquest.

Look again at v.2 – what was the rider given?



He was given a crown.

Who gave him the crown?

Verse 2 doesn't directly say.

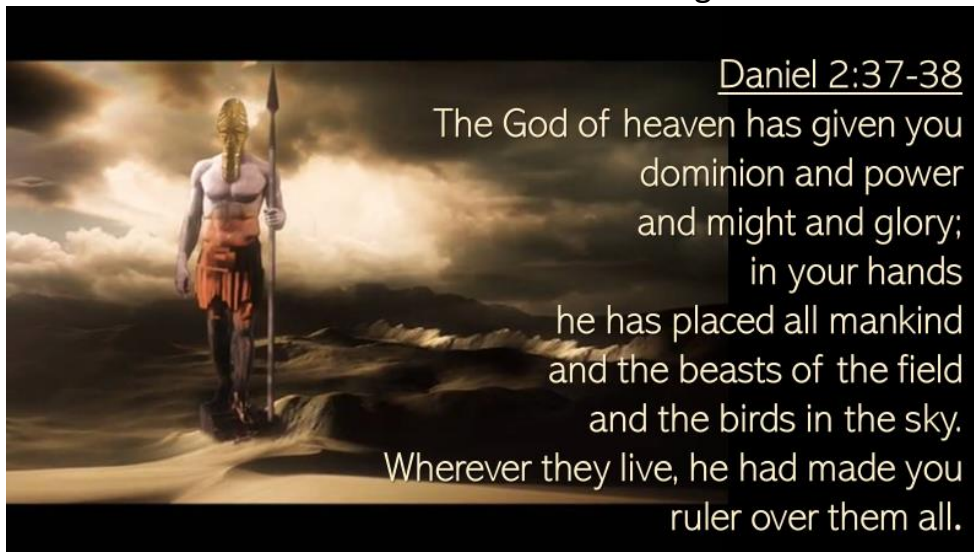
Is there other Scripture that would help us clarify?

Romans 13:1:

Romans 13:1

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

This is consistent with what Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar...



When God entrusts a person with leadership, they are faced with a choice in how they will exercise that leadership - in a God honoring way, or to build their own kingdom.

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, as the years went by, he came to believe that what had been given to him from God, had actually come about because of his own doing.

His prideful thoughts are recorded in Daniel 4:30 –

“Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”



Nebuchadnezzar came to a point where he truly believed his own press releases; where he made everything about Babylon about himself. This is why God brought judgement upon Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.

**The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.**

**Daniel 4:25 NKJV**

What God told Nabuchadnezzar is true in all times... “Heaven rules.” Heaven is in charge!

In the case of Babylon, though it once was an incredible kingdom and empire, because of sinful pride it now lies in ruins.





What happened with Babylon... in lesser and greater ways has happened with all nations of the world.

Acts 17:26 also describes the ways of God when it comes to the nations of the world.

## Acts 17:26-27

<sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

God gives every nation an opportunity to make the world a better place. And every nation, even those who begin well, even those who initially accomplish good things, at some point choose the way of conquest.

And the pursuit of conquest, always results in what the remaining three riders of Revelation 6 bring upon the earth.

## The second rider



What are we told about this rider? **Read v.3-4.**

He rides a fiery red horse.

He was given two things.

- A large sword.
- Power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other.

This rider follows closely behind the rider bent on conquest.

With the sword he sheds blood as he brings war upon the earth.

Artists and students of history confirm what Eugene Peterson says:



p.74.

We wish it were not so.

But sadly, the past century alone confirms this statement.

Quora.com on its website lists the major wars and conflicts of the past century.

#### THE LIST OF MAJOR WARS AND CONFLICTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

1898-1901 Boxer Rebellion  
1899-1902 Boer War  
1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War  
1910-1920 Mexican Revolution  
1912-1913 First and Second Balkan Wars  
1914-1918 World War I  
1915-1918 Armenian Genocide  
1917 Russian Revolution  
1918-1921 Russian Civil War  
1919-1921 Irish War of Independence  
1927-1937 Chinese Civil War  
1933-1945 Holocaust

#### THE LIST OF MAJOR WARS AND CONFLICTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

1935-1936 Second Italo-Abyssinian War  
1936-1939 Spanish Civil War  
1939-1945 World War II  
1945-1990 Cold War  
1946-1949 Chinese Civil War resumes  
1946-1954 First Indochina War (also known as the French Indochina War)  
1948 Israel War of Independence (also known as the Arab-Israeli War)  
1950-1953 Korean War  
1954-1962 French-Algerian War

## THE LIST OF MAJOR WARS AND CONFLICTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

1955-1972 First Sudanese Civil War

1956 Suez Crisis

1959 Cuban Revolution

1959-1975 Vietnam War

1967 Six-Day War

1973 Yom Kippur War (also known as the Arab-Israeli War)

1979-1989 Soviet-Afghan War

1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War

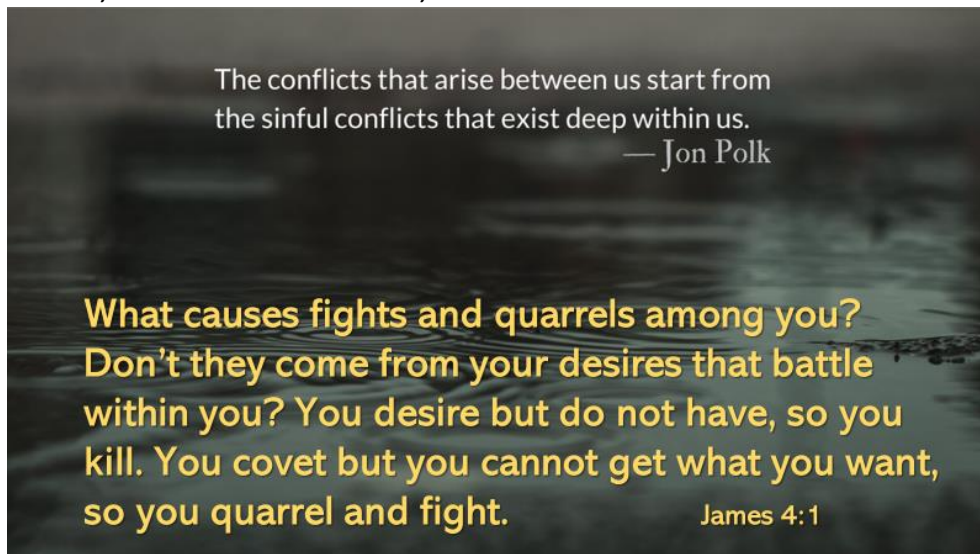
1990-1991 Persian Gulf War

1991-1995 Third Balkan War

1994 Rwandan Genocide

The number of deaths from these wars is estimated to be 187 million. This is the entirety of the Canadian population five times over. And we're only looking at one century.

James, the brother of Jesus, writes of this theme in 4:1:



Those bent on conquest are always motivated by sinful desires within themselves that influence them to fight and kill in order to get what they believe is theirs, or theirs to take or regain.

This is the heart of humanity without God.



### **The third rider.**



What are we told about this rider? **Read v.5.**

He rides a black horse.

He holds a pair of scales.

### **Read v.6a.**

Who is the voice that speaks?

John says, the voice comes from among the four living creatures.

### **Look back at 5:6.**

It is the Lamb who stands at the center of the throne, who is encircled by the four living creatures.

We are able to therefore deduce that the voice John hears is the voice of Jesus.

### **Read v.6b.**

What is it that is weighed on the scales? Food.

Food that for a day costs a whole day's wage.

But note... it is Jesus who sets the parameters of its impact.

GK Beale writes:

The prices mentioned in verse 6 were roughly eight to sixteen times the normal going price. The oil and wine would only be available for the very wealthy, as everyone else would be spending their income on the basics. p.128.





**\$40**

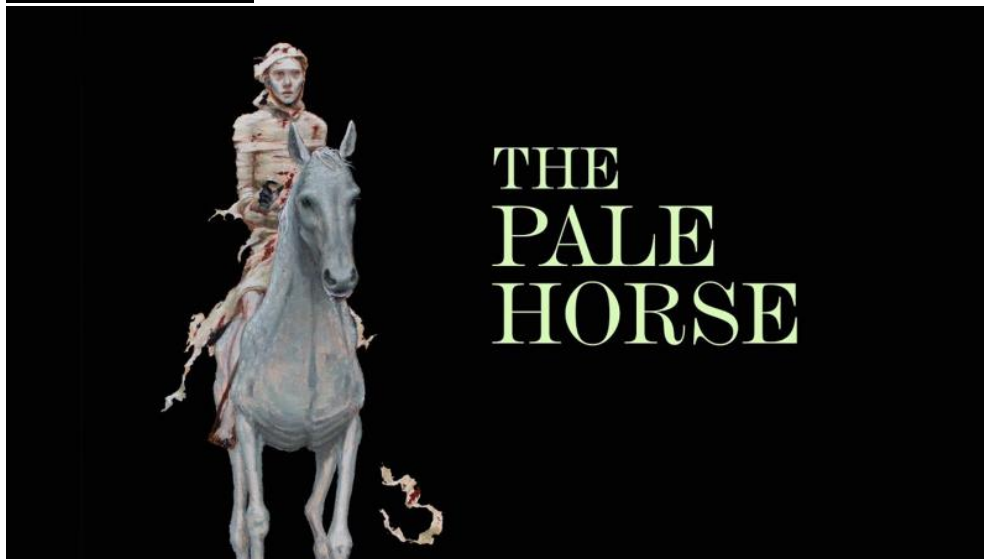
**\$32**



**\$64**

Wherever there is conquest and war, there will be famine and rationing of food. This is because conquest and war consume resources that would otherwise have been used as they were intended by God to provide for the daily physical needs of human beings.

### The fourth rider



What are we told about the rider? **Read v.7-8.**

He rides a pale horse.

His name is Death and Hades follows closely behind him.

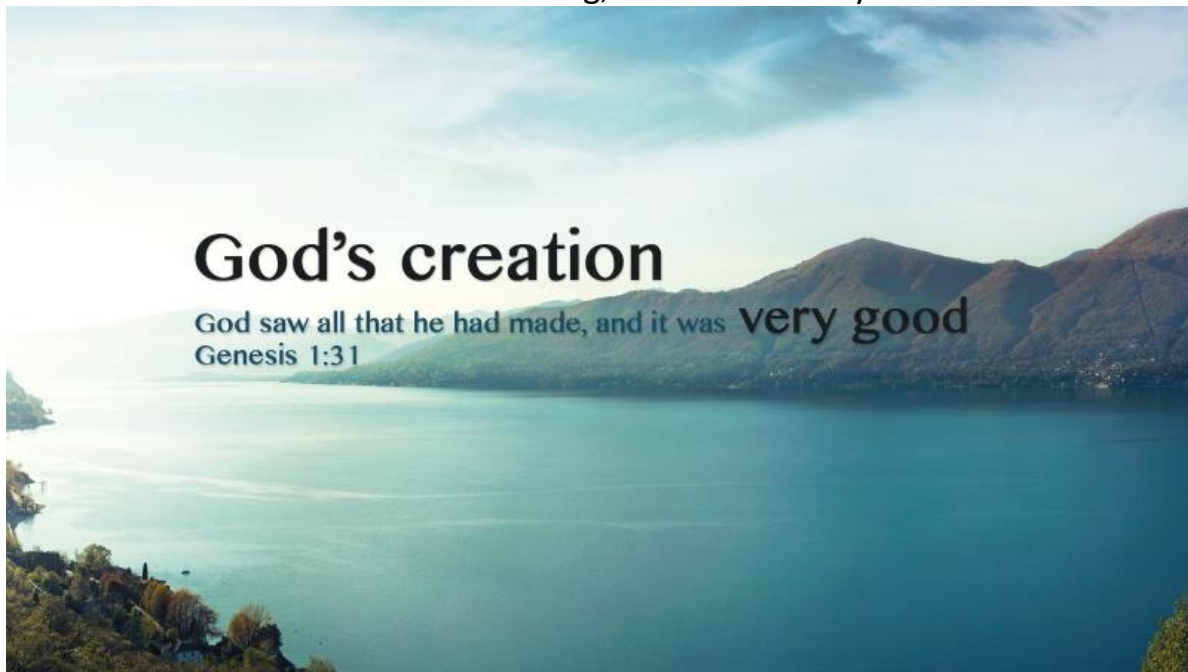
I remind you that Hades is the abode of the dead.

Darryl Johnson says, “This is an awful image. Death riding through the earth, and the Grave, now personified, gathering up the corpses.” p.172

The reader of Revelation 6 is meant to be gripped by the horror of this scene; of the tragedy of what life on earth has become at the hands of fallen humanity.

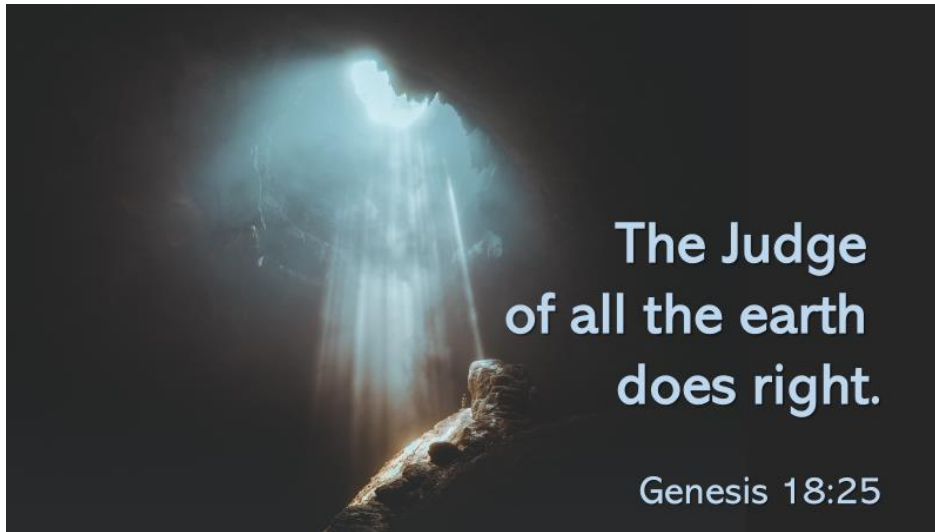
None of these things... conquest, war, famine, death, disease, dysfunction... were part of God’s creation design.

Remember... when he finished creating, Genesis 1:31 says...



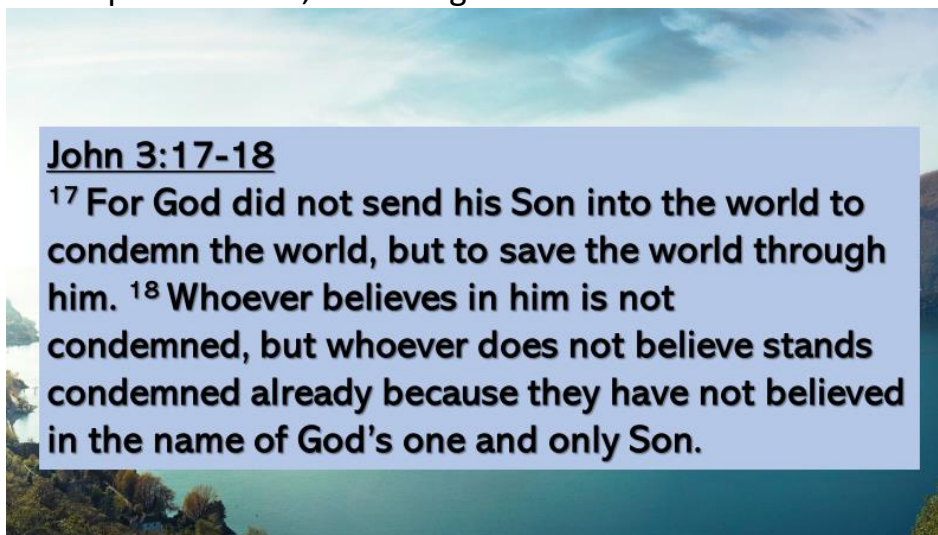
Without question, the things that happen at the hands of the horsemen, are judgments of God for the sin committed by human beings. There is no ground for any human being to accuse God of being cruel or unfair.

This was the testimony of Abraham...



God is just in what he does and what he ordains.

In this present time, according to John 3:17...



... the heart of God is to save through his Son, our Lord Jesus.

This is how we know that the judgements of Revelation 6 are a severe mercy.  
God purposes to use these judgements...

...to bring people to the end of themselves;

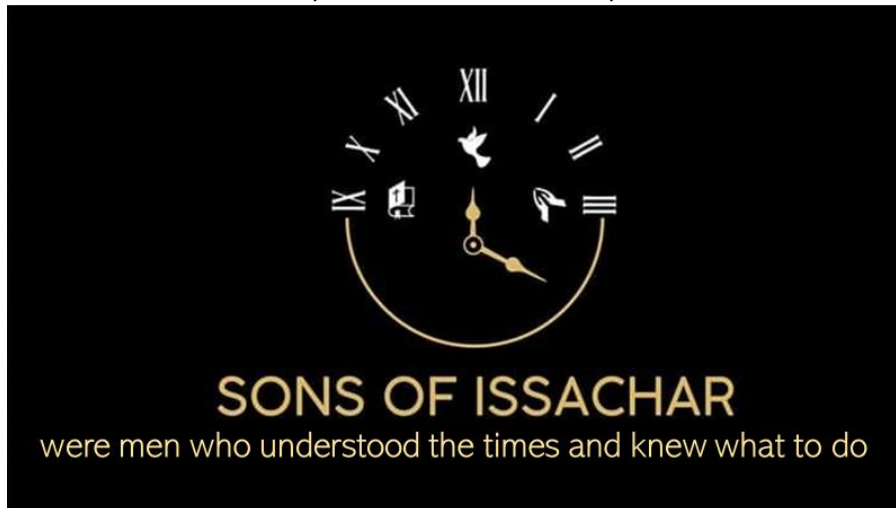
... to shatter their confidence in the myth of human self-sufficiency;

...to reveal their desperate need of a Savior;

...to open the eyes of their heart to see that they have built their lives upon a lie;

...and to persuade them to throw themselves upon the mercy of God. who would bring them home to himself, through Jesus Christ.

It was said in the OT, 1 Chronicles 12:32, that the sons of Issachar...



Jesus provided his church with the book of Revelation so that his followers would understand the times in which they live, the last days, and would know what to do, and not be shaken, that they would not live with fear, but understand that this is how the kingdom of God is advancing in this present time.

These four riders characterize what life on the earth is like without God. Every generation has believed the myth that human beings are inherently good. Without question: there is good within every person; and there is much good realized through individual and corporate endeavors.

But the Scripture bears testimony to the human condition. And this truth from God cannot be overlooked, or swept under the carpet. The Word of God says....

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.  
Who can understand it?

Jeremiah 17:9

Tom Wright says, “These four riders are the basic ills which humans inflict upon one another...They are allowed by the Lamb to do their worst because the problems they represent must be tackled head on, not side-stepped... God draws out the arrogant wickedness of humans to its full extent...” and in doing so, reveals and impresses upon humanity its desperate need of his Savior.

It is also important for us to put the three parables told by Jesus in Luke 16, the story of the lost sheep; the story of the lost coin; and the story of the lost son, alongside Revelation 6.

The triune God actively searches after the fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve in order to rescue them and bring them home.

Like the story of the lost son, God permits the consequences of sin to play out; to even devastate a person if that is needed, with the hope that his severe mercy will bring them to their senses, and awaken in them a longing and a passion to come home to God through repentance and faith in Jesus.

The book of Revelation impresses upon us in fresh ways that the gospel of Jesus is both good and bad news.

While it is not language often used today, it is nonetheless the language of scripture.

Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, and said to them...

**...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10**

The havoc caused by the four horsemen is severe and it is painful.



But remember what Jesus said in Matthew 24.

**Matthew 24:3-8**

<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of birth pains.

The things described are what?

The beginning of birth pangs.

Note again verse 6.

"These things must happen... but the end is still to come."

When we place Scripture alongside Scripture we learn that the judgements of Revelation 6 are, as I have said, an expression of mercy.

Humanity's desperate need requires God's drastic intervention.

Without question...the wrath of God is coming.

There is no future for evil and evil-doers.

This is an absolute certainty.

But today all who come to Jesus can be saved.

Today there is still opportunity for a person to turn to God; to serve him and to wait with confident hope for the return of Jesus.

**And for us who follow Jesus?**

We live in a fallen world and we will be touched by the things that happen on the earth – in the midst of it all we are assured of God's care and protection.

But we are not immune to troubles.

### Romans 8:18-25

<sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

- Our present sufferings are nothing compared to the glory that is coming. While this is true, we know frustration, we experience groanings and pain. But when compared to the glory to be revealed... We must remind each other of these things. We will come back to this theme again.... next week.

### Romans 8:18-25

<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

- We wait for Jesus with an eager expectation. Again, we must remind one another of these things.
- We live with a confident hope in our Savior. Our confidence is rooted in the promises of God – he gave to us a down payment in order to assure us that what he has promised he will do. What is the down payment? The Holy Spirit! He is with us as we wait for the appearing of our Rescuer!

But it is also bad news in that it announces...  
How foolish we are – we exchange the truth about God for a lie.  
There is only one truth, not seven billion.  
How lost we are - no human being can save themselves.  
There is only one-way home to God, not many.  
There is only one Savior and his name is Jesus.

If the gift of God is rejected, there is but one certain destiny... death.

The vision seen by John of seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls will detail for the reader how God overcomes...how his will, will be realized here on earth as it is in heaven.

And the means by which all of this takes place surprises every reader.

The original audience to whom the Revelation was written, knew the victory of Jesus over sin and death, and lived in that victory.

But they also experienced conflict with evil in spite of what the Scriptures pronounced in Colossians 2:15:

“Having disarmed the powers and authorities, [God] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

If evil powers were defeated, why are they still operative?

This has been a question that has plagued those who are in relationship with the triune God.

It is a question which the Revelation answers.

But the manner in which the book of Revelation is structured, reveals that this question is secondary, not primary.

Let me explain.

The book of Revelation does not begin with the question of evil.

Rather the reader is presented with a glorious vision of the victorious Christ in chapter one, and then in chapter four, we see the magnificent scene of worship in heaven that immerses the reader, as Eugene Peterson writes, “in the centering reality of God’s rule and redemption.” p.73.

Things are not as they seem.

Michael Wilcock says, “We do not need Jesus Christ to tell us that the world is broken and full of trouble. But we do need his explanation of history...” ... and the understanding of how God is at work in this world.” I Saw Heaven Opened, p.69

The four horse riders in Revelation 6 and what they do reveal this to us.

Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

John 1:4-5 says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

We just considered Romans 6:23 - the wages of sin is death.

When he created our first parents, God gifted them with a will.

They had been created to live in relationship with God, a relationship of love that trusted and delighted in the Creator, as he did so in them.

But God would not, nor did he compel their love.

God would not, nor did he force their allegiance.

In his command to them... to not eat from a particular tree... our first parents were given the opportunity to choose.

The thing we need to be clear about is that choices always have consequences.

God had told our first parents, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” Genesis 2:17

The wages of sin is death.

This is the message emphasized in Revelation 6.

It is true that the serpent deceived Eve.

It is true that he lied to her when he told her “you will not certainly die” if you eat from this tree.

But the choice made by our first parents was nonetheless real and resulted in the very consequence which God had warned them of.

The gift of God is life, but the consequence of sin is death.  
The message of the Bible is that death is not just the absence of physical life.  
The decay of death touches all aspects of human life.

The vision of the four horse riders impresses upon the reader how God acts in justice to deal with sin and death

Jesus said in John 8:44 that the devil “is a liar and the father of lies.”  
Jesus further said about the devil that “there is no truth in him.”

The Corinthian church was instructed that “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” 2 Corinthians 11:14.  
This truth explains why Satan’s servants pretend to be of Christ when they are not... they are simply acting like the one they follow.

When Jesus’ disciples, in Matthew 24:3, asked him “what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age,” Jesus told them...  
“Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am the Messiah,” and will deceive many.” Matthew 24:4-5