

The second, third and fourth seals

• Three more horses

• Red – bloodshed and violence

• Black – economic scarcity

• Pale green – death on a large scale

After the first horse (representing the triumphant preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ), there follow three other horses: ³*When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living being say, 'Come.'* ⁴*And another horse came on the scene, a red one. To the rider sitting on it authority was given to take away peace from the earth. Men and women were allowed to kill each other. To the rider was given a large sword.*

⁵*And when the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living being saying, 'Come.'* ⁶*I looked up and standing there was a black horse. The rider sitting on it had a pair of scales in his hand.* ⁷*Then I heard what seemed to be a voice coming from the middle of the four living beings. The voice said, 'A measure of wheat for a day's wages, and three measures of barley for a day's wages. And do not damage the oil and the wine.'*

⁸*Then when the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living being saying, 'Come.'* ⁹*I looked and there before me was a pale green horse. The name of the rider sitting on it was 'Death'. Hades was following close behind him. They were given authority over a quarter of the earth to kill people with the sword, and by starvation, by disease and by the wild animals of the earth.'*

The red horse represents bloodshed and violence. The black horse and its rider represent economic scarcity. The horse which has the colour of a corpse represents death coming upon the world on a large scale. In general these points are clear, but the question is, how should these be interpreted?

Interpretation?

(i) *Some take them as general statements*

(i) For some people they are **general statements** about what is to happen in the world's future history. They understand the passage to mean there will come war and famine and events that bring about death in large numbers. This may be accepted, but I think John's vision goes beyond generalities like this.

(ii) *Others – things that Jesus will conquer*

(ii) One expositor says they are mentioned as **things that Jesus will conquer**. He believes that 'What is being said here is that Christ will ultimately overcome them'. Well, I agree Christ will ultimately overcome them but that is not what is being said here. It is Christ's opening the seals that brings them! He is not (at this stage) overcoming them; he is sending them!

(iii) *Others judgements on those rejecting the gospel*

(iii) Is the point then that these are **God's judgements** upon those who reject the gospel? Perhaps this is part of the matter because it is Christ who is opening the seals. Yet this is the emphasis of the next section – the 'trumpets of judgement' – and not so much the emphasis of this section.

(iv) *Others take them as the sufferings of the church*

(iv) Is what is in mind here a reference to **the sufferings of the church**? This is surely getting closer to the point of John's vision. The book of Revelation is full of the theme of persecution¹. It is not general sufferings that are in view here but the sufferings of the church. These horses follow the first horse. The vision is dealing with things that are the consequence of the preaching of the gospel. The second horse speaks of persecution. All who are godly will suffer persecution². The third horse speaks of the economic sufferings of Christians because of their refusal to co-operate with sin and paganism. The fourth horse speaks (it would seem) of religious wars and sufferings that are caused

• *A consequence of gospel preaching*

¹ see 1:9; 2:9, 10, 13; 3:10

² 2 Timothy 3:12

speaks (it would seem) of religious wars and sufferings that are caused by hostility towards the gospel of Jesus. One thinks of the persecutions of Christians in South Sudan where millions died in the latter part of the twentieth century simply because they were not Moslems. One thinks of countries where university education is withheld from Christians and positions in government are guarded for this religious group or that group – but not for the Christians.

Troubles are all part of God's plan

• In some ways Revelation 6 resembles Matthew 24

• Birth pains

• A warning of what is often likely to happen in the preaching of the gospel so that we might be ready for conflict

• Courage! Jesus has conquered!

The point of the three horses that follow the first horse is surely this: the preaching of the gospel does not bring in the end of the world just yet. One might think the progress of the gospel – the riding out of Christ conquering and with the purpose of conquering yet more – might bring in fullness of joy and blessing for the people of God. It does indeed and yet the kingdom does not immediately come in its fullness. In some way Revelation 6 resembles Matthew 24: when Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem^{□1} and the disciples asked for fuller details^{□2}, Jesus said that there would come false Christs opposing the gospel. There would come wars and rumours of wars but (he said) 'the end is not yet'^{□3}. There would come conflicts among nations but (Jesus said) 'these things are the beginning of birth-pains'. Troubles like the ones mentioned in Revelation 6:3–8 and Matthew 24:3–7 are like the first pains when something new is about to begin. Jesus' gospel goes out into the world, but he did not come to bring peace; he brings a sword^{□4}. Following the preaching of the gospel there is often persecution, economic suffering and immense conflicts between the nations as pagan peoples seek to oppose the gospel. Revelation warns us of what is often likely to happen in the preaching of the gospel so that we might be ready for conflict. 'In the world you face persecution', said Jesus, but he went on to say, 'But take courage; I have conquered the world!' The troubles that come to the people of God are all part of a plan of history that is under the control of Jesus. Persecutions do not defeat him. He is the one opening the scrolls.

□1 Matthew 24:1-2

□2 Matthew 24:3

□3 Matthew 24:6

□4 Matthew 10:34



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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