The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
Revelation 6:1-8

John is on the isle of Patmos as a prisoner under Emperor Domitian for refusing to submit to Caesar worship; suddenly he sees a door open in heaven; a loud voice speaks to him like a the sound of a trumpet saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this” (4:1); immediately he was taken up into heaven in spirit and he beheld One sitting on a throne; it is God the Father holding in His right hand a seven sealed scroll; around the throne are 24 elders seated on thrones and in the midst of the throne and before the throne are four living creatures—cherubim that protects the holiness of God; also around the throne were many angels—ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.

A strong angel, most likely Gabriel asks “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” (5:2); there is silence in heaven; not one of the four living creatures, nor the myriads of angels, nor the 24 elders, nor all the saints in heaven spoke a word; none were worthy.

Then in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as though it had been slain; He came and takes the scroll from the hand of Him who sat on the throne.

When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures along with the 24 elders fell before the Lamb each having a harp; they sang a new song, “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (5:9-10).

Then the myriads of angels burst into song, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing” (5:12).
Then every creature which is in heaven and on earth began to give praise to God the Father and to the Lamb, “Blessing and honor and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever” (5:13b).

As we come to chapter 6 we see where the Lamb holds the scroll for He alone is worthy to break its seals; the scroll is God’s title deed to the universe and it will reveal the “things which must take place after this” (4:1).

As the first four seals are broken out come four horses each with a rider; the first is the white horse of peace; then the fiery red horse of war; then the black horse of famine; and finally the pale horse of death; these are the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

The White Horse Named Counterfeit (6:1-2)

“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 upon it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer” (6:1-2).

*The interpretation of the horse...* “Behold a white horse...” The white horse is always a symbol of military victory; when a Roman general celebrated a triumph he would parade through the streets of Rome with his armies and captives and his spoils after a great victory; his chariot was drawn by white horses.

When Christ returns for a second time with His saints, He and His saints come astride white horses at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 19:11, 14); He comes to make war against all who oppose Him and to bring to an end the rule of the Antichrist and to bind Satan for 1,000 years and then to set up His Millennial Kingdom; He comes as a militant warrior and the white horse on which He rides announces victory over all evil and over all His enemies.

*The identification of the rider on the white horse...* “He who sat upon it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer” (6:2b); Many have identified the rider as the victorious Christ who comes to earth at the end of the Tribulation; they do so for the reason just stated; when He returns in His second coming He comes on a white horse.
However, we see a different rider on this horse; the rider cannot be Christ because the first seal starts the Tribulation; Jesus comes only once during the seven year Tribulation—at the very end of those cataclysmic years.

Another reason the rider is not Christ is because this rider is wearing a crown which in Greek is *stephanos*, a laurel wreath given to athletes who win in sporting games like the Olympics; the crowns which are many that Christ wears when He returns are called the *diadema*, which are royal crowns (Revelation 19:12); therefore, we believe the rider on the white horse to be the Antichrist himself; He is a counterfeit Christ who will bring about a counterfeit peace on earth.

He has a bow in his hand but there is no mention of arrows; that suggests He comes as a conqueror but not in a militant way; He conquers by deception offering a false peace.

Following the rapture of the church, perhaps as many as two billion people suddenly disappear from the earth; this will cause quite a shock and unsettlement to the world; this will result in millions dying as pilots are transported to heaven while piloting their 747s, automobiles will go out of control and crash as drivers are caught up to be with the Lord; on and on we could go describing various events that would put those left behind in a very serious situation; then you have Russia and her Muslim allies attacking Israel in the Ezekiel 38-39 war; Israel wins that war with the help of God and this is another shock to the world; that war has never occurred and it is possible it will happen before the Tribulation begins.

*The instability of the end times*... The world is in turmoil and looking for leadership; the Muslim world is stunned because it cannot defeat the tiny nation of Israel; the Jews want to rebuild their Temple on Temple Mount where the Muslim Dome of the Rock sits; into this vacuum steps a strong charismatic leader who promises that he can solve the Middle East crisis that will bring peace between Israel and the Arab world; in fact, he promises to bring about a worldwide peace.

The first thing he does is negotiate a covenant between Israel and the Muslim Arab world to allow the Jews to build their Temple on Temple Mount next to the Gentile Muslim Shrine (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 11:1-2); the world is amazed at his accomplishment and in time will recognize him as leader of the One World Government.
This rider on the white horse is the Antichrist; he is a counterfeit Christ who offers a counterfeit peace; a peace that begins with a covenant between Israel and Arab-Muslims; I find it interesting that the word “bow” which is in the hand of the Antichrist is the Hebrew word qesheth, the same word used for “rainbow” in Genesis 9:13 (LXX), that signified God’s covenant promise to Noah; the peace treaty of the Antichrist is a covenant promise to Israel and Arab-Muslims.

*The insecurity of the current times...* Today, the world is closer to war then it has been in decades; North Korea is playing around with nuclear missiles and Senator Lindsey Graham recently said, “If North Korea shoots off another missile there is a 30% chance President Trump will go to war, if they send up another nuclear missile there is a 70% we will go to war.” Nikki Haley, our UN Ambassador, has offered conclusive evidence that Iran has violated the nuclear agreement set up under President Obama; we do not want a nuclear armed Iran; the recent decision by our President to officially declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move our embassy there has many concerned that this will prevent any further peace negotiations in the Middle East.

The Antichrist comes on the scene when the world is threatened with or engaged in a major war; Jesus warned that one of the signs that the Tribulation was near at hand is, “You will hear of wars and rumors of war... Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom...” (Matthew 24:6-7a).

We have been taught as Christians that the world is heading toward a major war; we are headed for Armageddon and perhaps even a nuclear holocaust; we have been told that as time moves toward the end that there will be the escalation of war, crime, financial instability, moral decay, and yes, these things will occur, but the first seal tells us there will also be world peace; it will be temporary, but that is what the Antichrist first brings to the world once he gains power; once he comes riding through the earth on his white horse there will be worldwide peace.

This peace, however, will be a deceptive peace; there will be a false sense of security; there was a day, not too many years back when world leaders got caught up in believing there will be peace on earth, good will toward men; once the Soviet Union collapsed, Pope John Paul II spoke of the world awakening from a nightmare to “a better hope.” Mikhail Gorbachev optimistically said: “We see a budding world order in which peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation based on good will, will be universal norms.”
In a speech to the American people, President George Bush said, “We’re beginning a new era. This new era can be full of promise, an age of freedom, a time of peace for all peoples....”

We would do well to remember that there was an optimistic assurance of peace throughout Europe before World War II; however Winston Churchill never bought into Hitler’s offer of peace; William Manchester’s biography of Sir Winston Churchill confronts us with the awful reminders of Hitler; Manchester wrote, “Thomas Jones who had been in and out of Whitehall for a quarter century wrote in his diary, ‘All sorts of people who have met Hitler are convinced that he is a factor for peace. He doesn’t seek war but friendship. Meeting the press after he had been closeted with Hitler, Lloyd George said he “regarded him as the greatest living German. I only wish we had a man of his supreme quality at the head of affairs in our country today.””

Nazi goals were even applauded by Anglican clergymen, a group of whom expressed, “Boundless admiration for the moral and ethical side of the Nazi program, it’s clear stand for religion and Christianity and its ethical principles.”

Churchill was never deceived by Hitler, but he stood almost alone; the deception was practically universal; almost everyone misread Hitler and they walked into his false peace and were slaughtered.

Once Hitler became Hitler and started his march across Europe and the gassing of six million Jews, theologians began to refer to him as the Antichrist; Revelation identifies the Antichrist by the number of his name: His number is 666 (13:17-18); William Barclay quotes Dr. Kepler who during World War II provided us with an example of how Hitler could well be the Antichrist; using the formula A=100, B=101, C=102; D=103 and so on, then we can work out the following sum:

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\begin{align*}
\text{H} &= 107 \\
\text{I} &= 108 \\
\text{T} &= 119 \\
\text{L} &= 111 \\
\text{E} &= 104 \\
\text{R} &= 117
\end{align*}
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And the sum is 666!

Hitler certainly was a type of Antichrist; as John wrote, “many Antichrists will come”, but there is “the Antichrist” (1 John 2:18); when he comes on the scene he comes offering peace to the world; he comes riding the white horse named
“Counterfeit” for he is not only a counterfeit Christ, but he offers a counterfeit peace.

Not only do we have the white horse named Counterfeit, we now have:

The Red Horse Named Conflict (6:3-4)

“When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’ Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat upon it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another, and there was given to him a great sword” (6:3-4).

The parting of peace...The rider on this horse is once again the Antichrist; he came on the scene bringing a promise of peace astride a white horse, and for a short while there was peace; but now he rides on his fiery red horse and takes peace from the earth.

The plan of God for judgment... Many teach that the wrath of God is not poured out until the second half of the tribulation, they teach that the Tribulation does not begin until the Antichrist has been on the scene for three and a half years; while it is true that the second three and a half years are worse than the first three and a half, yet the entire seven years is God’s judgment on a world that has rejected His Son and mistreated His covenant people Israel.

During the entire tribulation God is using Satan and his partner the Antichrist to bring some of His judgments on the earth; he even uses the Antichrist to begin war; observe these words; “it was granted to the one who sat on it [the fiery red horse] to take peace from the earth” (6:4a); who gave the permission to start the war? the Antichrist cannot act apart from God’s permission; after all, He is the sovereign One of the universe; so the Antichrist is being used of God to bring about His judgments and in this case to start wars.

The picture of wars in end time events from Jewish literature... In the Jewish picture of the end times, the last days of the world as men will know it is the complete disintegration of all human relationships; the prophet Zechariah wrote: “And it shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor, and raise his hand against his neighbors hand” (Zechariah 14:13).
Intertestamental writings by Jewish authors spoke of the horrors of the endtimes; the book of Enoch says that from dawn to sunset men will slay each other (Enoch 100:12); the Fourth book of Ezra says that friend shall war against friend; friends will attack one another suddenly (4 Ezra 5:9; 6:24); the Second book of Baruch says envy shall rise in those who had no thought of themselves, and passion shall rise in him who is peaceful. Many shall be stirred up in anger to injure many, and they shall rouse up all men in order to shed blood, and in the end they shall all perish together (2 Baruch 48:37).

The vision of the end times to the Jews was a vision of a time when all human relations were destroyed, and the world becomes a seething caldron of embittered hate; even Jesus warned that in the last days “many will betray one another, and will hate one another” (Matthew 24:10).

The pretense of “peace and safety”... Paul tells us that one thing which also characterizes the end times is people saying, “Peace and safety” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3); Ezekiel tells us before Israel is attacked in the Gog-Magog war it will be at a time when “My people Israel dwell safely...” (Ezekiel 38:14).

God does not want any of us to be deceived; while world leaders seek to bring peace on earth, it will be a futile effort; however, during the great Tribulation, following the rapture of the Church, the Antichrist enters the scene riding a white horse promising peace on earth, good will toward men; there will be peace but his peace is counterfeit; a false peace, for once in control, he changes horses and begins to ride the fiery red horse of conflict; it is then he was given “a great sword”; military power is given to the Antichrist as God is allowing him to start a war; (We will begin to see the effects of this war in next week’s lesson when the Lamb opens the fifth seal).

Not only do we have the white horse named Counterfeit, and the red horse named Conflict, we have:

The Black Horse Named Commerce (6:5-6)

“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 upon it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and the wine’” (6:5-6).
The coming of a worldwide famine... Once again the rider on this horse is the Antichrist; he comes riding on a black horse with “a pair of scales in his hand”; the scales symbolize famine and the economic problems that will come upon the earth during the Tribulation.

The color black is connected with famine; Jeremiah, in lamenting over the degradation of Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, speaks of those left behind in Jerusalem as starving from a great famine; he writes how the tongue of the infant clings to the roof of their mouths and young children ask for bread but no one breaks it for them; he speaks of her Nazarites who were once brighter than snow, now they are blacker than soot and their skin clings to their bones; they go unrecognized in the streets (Lamentations 4:4-8);

The control of the Antichrist over the world’s economy... When we get to Revelation 13:16-18 we will learn how the Antichrist will control the economy; he will require the mark of the beast on the right hand or forehead for one to buy or sell; this mark is evidence of one having worshipped the Antichrist; of course, those who come to Christ during the Tribulation cannot take the mark and remain loyal to Christ; the persecution of the Christian during the reign of Antichrist is not only death from war, but to those who survive it will be starvation and ultimate death.

The cost of human lives due to famines... Even though the Antichrist controls the economy, there is a worldwide famine; famines come as an aftermath of war—the greater the war, the greater the famine; during and immediately following World War I more than 27 million people died of starvation from worldwide famines; more than 20 million died of malnutrition and associated diseases during World War II; that is more than were killed in the war which was 19.5 million.

During famines desperate people will eat anything they can get their hands on, including cats, dogs, rats, and even other human beings; in the book Fearful Famines of the Past, the author writes of a famine in Russia in the year 1600 in which 500 thousand people died; he says: “Cats, dogs, and rats were eaten, the strong overcame the weak, and in the shambles of the public market human flesh was sold. Multitudes of dead were found with their mouths stuffed with straw.”

Readers Digest, April 1969 had an article titled “The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad”; It was during World War II when “husbands ate their wives, wives ate their husbands, and parents ate their children.”
The article told the story of a man named Dmitri who went with a well dressed man into his house to bargain for food; as they arrived on the top floor of the man’s house, someone inside asked, “Who is it?”

“It is me,” the well dressed man replied, “with a live one.”

Dmitri froze at the words; then the door opened and he saw a hairy red hand and a mug like face; from the room came a strange, warm, heavy smell; suddenly a gust of wind in the hall caught the door, and in the swaying candlelight Dmitri got a glimpse of several hunks of white meat swinging from hooks on the ceiling; from one hook he saw a dangling human hand with long fingers and blue veins.

The men lunged toward Dmitri, but he leaped down the stairs shouting, “Cannibals!” fortunately some soldiers were passing and they shot and killed the cannibals; they found five human carcasses hanging in the house.

*The cause of famines as a curse from God...* Fami...es are the result of the land not producing its crops and the trees not yielding its fruit; and all of that is the curse of God upon a people who do not honor Him and obey His laws; in Deuteronomy we read were the LORD said to ancient Israel: “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God... Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading trough. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle and the young of your flock... And the heavens over your head shall be brass, and the earth under your feet shall be iron. The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down upon you until you are destroyed” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 17-18, 23-24).

From peace to war to famine, God is using the Antichrist to bring His judgments on a world that has rejected His Son and persecuted His covenant people.

*The cost of food during the tribulation...* During the tribulation God through the Antichrist is going to curse the land; the price for food will be very expensive; “a quart of wheat for a denarius”; a denarius is one day’s wages and a quart of wheat will sustain one person with a moderate appetite for one day; so you work just one day to eat the bare minimum for yourself, but leave nothing for your family.

Then He says, “Three quarts of barley for a denarius”; you could get more food for your family if you settled for barley which was animal food; low in nutritional...
value, barley was cheaper, but at least the family could eat; so people will line up for food—there choice is between bread enough to feed one, or dog kibble to feed a family.

Then He says, “Do not harm the oil or the wine”; oil was used to prepare bread; and wine was used in cooking; without those essentials, preparing food would be impossible; suddenly the bare staples become luxuries; the warning has been given: a global famine is coming and it is the Antichrist who has a pair of scales in his hand by which he determines the price of food as he controls the economy.

Not only do we have the white horse named Counterfeit and the Red horse named Conflict and the Black horse named Commerce, we finally have:

The Pale Horse Named Corpse (6:7-8)

“When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked and behold, a pale horse. And the name of Him who sat upon it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death and by the beasts of the earth” (6:7-8).

The color of the pale horse... Again the rider of this pale colored horse is the Antichrist and his name is Death; the color “pale” in Greek is chloros, from where we get the word chlorine; the color of the horse then is a pale, ghastly green, the color of leprosy; the word is translated green is Mark 6:39; Revelation 8:7; 9:4.

The condemnation of those who follow the Antichrist... The Antichrist is followed by Hades; Hades follows death, for Hades is the temporary abode of the ungodly until their resurrection at the end of the Millennium when they will stand before the great white throne judgment; the dead are judged according to their works and by the things written in the Word of God and the Book of Life; then Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire for their names were not written in the Book of Life (Revelation 19:11-15).

The command given to the Antichrist... Authority is given to the Antichrist to kill one fourth of the earth; again this authority comes from God; Satan can do nothing without God’s permission; God then permits the death of one fourth of the earth’s population; how many might that be? If we conclude that 2 billion people were raptured before the Tribulation that would leave 6 billion left on earth; one fourth of 6 billion would be 1.5 billion people who will be killed either
by sword, or by famine, or by pestilence, or by the beasts of the earth; 1.5 billion will die in the first half of the Tribulation and another half is yet to come.

*The causes of death...* You may wonder where I came up with the word “pestilence”; notice the phrase “with death”; what is that? The word for “death” *thanatos* is the same word for pestilence; so along with war and famine, people will die of natural disasters, like earthquakes, diseases, floods, and so forth; Jesus talked about the end times being marked by wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places (Matthew 24:7).

But there is one more cause of death, the beasts of the earth; they too play apart in assisting the Antichrist in his role to kill off one fourth of the earth’s population; what beast could John be writing about? Do you know what animal is the most deadly on earth? We have them living right here in Southern California—in fact they are all over the world; it the rat; rats are responsible for the loss of billions of dollars of food in America alone and death all over the world; rats infested with Bubonic Plague killed one-third of the population of Europe in the fourteenth century; rats carry as many as thirty-five diseases at once and amazingly if ninety-five percent of the rat population is exterminated, it will replace itself in less than a year; rats have killed more people than all the wars of history and they always make their home where men dwell.

With wars and famine and earthquakes, sanitation goes; with no medicine, living conditions descend to a primitive level and rats may be the beast that kills.

*The conclusion from four of the seals...* When the Lamb, the Risen Lord Himself, takes the seven sealed scroll from the right hand of the Father who sits on the throne and breaks the first four seals, out come four horses and the rider on each one is the Antichrist; there is the white horse named Counterfeit as the Antichrist comes on the scene as a counterfeit Christ offering a counterfeit peace; next comes the fiery red horse named Conflict who begins wars around the world as all peace is gone; next comes the black horse named Commerce as the Antichrist controls the world’s economy because of a worldwide famine and finally there is the pale horse named Corpse as one fourth of the world’s population dies during the first three and one half years of the Tribulation.

The only hope for us is to escape the great Tribulation by coming to Christ and getting caught up in the rapture when Christ comes for His Church; the question all must answer is found in the book of Hebrews, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3).