

First Seal: The Conqueror

⁶ 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~~." ² 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.

At the opening of the first 4 seals, it is one of the Living Creatures that gives John the instruction to "Come". This is a forceful, almost aggressive instruction, and it is softened by the added words "and see". These are not recorded in the original Greek and were added around the 4th Century to try and diminish the power of these 4 creatures. By giving the Revelator instructions, they present themselves as in some control, or certainly demonstrate pre-knowledge, of events that are to take place. The Living Creature knows something important will shortly happen in this place, so he instructs John to go there.

You could also interpret this as the Living Creatures instructing the horse to come forth. These Creatures are so powerful that they are able to call forth the Judgement that will be played out on the Earth.

What we see is a man sitting on a white horse, with a bow that can fire long arrows. He has the crown of a king and he goes wherever he wishes to conquer. This indicates that this monarch has a very wide reach but also that has the authority to conquer and do what he wishes. The purity of the white horse represents that this is no doubt a pure and true power, doing God's will.

Second Seal: Conflict on Earth

³ When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come ~~and see~~." ⁴ 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 to him a great sword.

The second Creature steps in and directs John to see another horse. The scene darkens somewhat. The White Horse is joined by a Red one whose rider is given the authority to remove Peace from the earth. This is the sewer of destruction and he

wields a powerful instrument of war. By being handed a 'great' sword, he similarly is given the authority of war, to go where he wills and do what he deems necessary.

Third Seal: Scarcity on Earth

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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."

A third command and the scene darkens yet again. The third horse, black, comes forward with scales in his hand. The scarcity on the earth raises prices of wheat and barley to the point where their measurement must be careful and oil and wine are rare to get, as many as 12 times their standard prices. This judgement is important for the real things in life and the things that life itself is structured around.

Fourth Seal: Widespread Death on Earth

⁷ When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come ~~and~~ see." ⁸ So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on 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.

The fourth instruction merges the previous 3 Horses into one, disturbing behemoth. The Pale Horse shines in the black scene with Death personified sitting on its top. He holds all the previous authorities given to the other 3; power from the first; expanded even to power over the beasts of the earth, a sword from the second and hunger from the third. The amalgamation of those 3 previous horses has led to this reign, the reign of death and destruction leaving a wasteland in its wake.

Who are these 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse – as they are very commonly called.

We established in the last chapter that the witnesses who sealed Christ's will were those who experienced his love and saving grace through the church periods. This must, therefore, translate to the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos and Thyatira. We need, therefore, to examine these churches and see if their qualities related in the earlier messages relate here, or if we can find them in history.

Horse 1 – Ephesus (33-100AD)

The first church emerged from the resurrection white, pure and beautiful. Full of promise, it was crowned the heir to the Jewish nation and to Salvation itself. It is presented as a crowned monarch with a bow – an interesting choice of weapon. A bow can pierce its foes before they get close enough but is vulnerable if it gets close enough. It's also a weapon that takes a long time to learn, and while it was never considered a child's weapon, it was probably the first weapon put into the hands of anyone growing up. (Technically, all English males over the age of 14 are legally required to undertake two hours of longbow practice every week, supervised by the local clergy since Henry V at Agincourt)

This is a young authority and is given a wide scope to conquer whatever it likes. The early church – as evidenced by every portion of the New Testament, was tasked with evangelising and spreading the reality of Jesus to the world. They attempted to do this.

Horse 2 – Smyrna (100 – 313AD)

The next horse is red, no doubt a reference to the blood spilt by the Martyrs that were oppressed during this time. Nevertheless, the conclusion of this Church, as we have seen ad nauseum, was that Constantine stood forth and commanded both the Church and State.

But in Isaiah, red also denotes sin and we have again discussed heavily the start of the influences of this that impacted the church prior to Constantine's reign. At this stage, the church was only just in sin; it was not yet damned.

The number of civil wars, complex interpersonal conflicts and the wide variety of brutal events in this time period certainly match the entire world going about to kill and brutalise one another.

Horse 3 - Pergamos (313 – 538AD)

The next horse steps forward black as pitch, with a figure holding scales to make judgments. He declares the prices for wheat and barley which are up to 12 times their actual prices for the time.

The Denarius was the 'standard coin' – the cultural equivalent to the shilling – in Roman Time. They were made of silver and were a part of the currency reorganisation after the Carthaginian silver was brought to Rome after the 2nd Punic Wars. So much silver was flooded into Rome that the price of a loaf of bread tripled overnight and the currency had to be reinvented. The Denarius was a silver coin with an average weight of 6.81 grams, or 1/48 of a Roman pound, but that quantity of silver – and corresponding size of the coin – had about halved by 100AD. Dinar – divisions of 10 – refers to the 10 Asses that the Denarius could be split into like our Dollar can be split into 100 cents.

Translating money is extremely difficult considering the 2000 years that have passed between then and now, but if we take the Augustus reforms, we know that the Roman Soldier was paid 225 Denarii per year. Of that, 60 Denarii were taken out of his pay per year to pay for food – and Legionaries were considered well fed. A 'quart', as referenced here, was about the same as a soldier would receive for a day's eating – so this inflation raised prices by 6 times. Other estimates I've seen rise as high as 12 times the average prices.

Much could be made about wheat, barley, oil and wine but in reality, these are simply staple foods; two of which are extremely expensive and the other two so expensive they're not worth considering.

During this time, the church, as we have already reflected, was flooded by alternative views and ideas that were not positive for Jesus' message. This was the time when all manner of alternative views and ideas came in and simply invaded the church. Each was required to be weighed and measured against the 'established' view and determined if some change was needed.

The result of these views was that virtue and truth in this Church were sorely lacking, here described as being expensive. They were expensive in several ways.

Lets take Christmas as an example. The idea of celebrating Jesus' birth on earth is creditable. There is much value in this, although the exact date is lost. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, Jesus was born on July 1st. Those who hold this date as important, at first, are creditable. But in a short order, the date was changed to December 25th to match with a number of other, pagan festivals. Those who held the original day were ridiculed, paying a particular cost.

Then other practises started to creep into the story. Mary was promoted and Jesus was, not necessarily unrightly, infantilised. Those who did not wish to engage in the adoration of Mary again have to suffer the social costs. Then the other trappings arrived in short order; the Wise Men were presented on their own, the trees supposedly decorated by the shepherds and magi, the German Yule Log all creep their way into the story. Those who don't wish to take part in these pay a price, and truth ends up becoming very expensive.

Salvation too, is quickly made more and more expensive. First, repentance was formalised and, in short order, confession to a priest was required. Then penance and indulgences were laid on thickly, all marred by the Church claiming itself as the only way to Salvation from death and destruction. Those who chose to hold different views on matters as simple as Christmas risked not only social ostracism, but being declared outside of the Church and outside of God's salvation. While we, today, recognise this as insanity, the psychological payment of those individuals would have been immense.

The horseman here is saying that this church slips from being the bastion of God's word to being the degenerate and repugnant body it remains today; a group where truth and virtue are more precious – and more rare – than Gold.

Horse 4 – Thyatira (538 – 1536AD)

Finally, the fourth phase of the Church steps forth on a pale horse. Pale does not mean white, but sickly, pallid and possibly a bone cream colour that indicates it is not a healthy horse in any form. Riding this beast is the personification of Death itself. Hell – both the Grave and the ignominy that goes with it – follow this horseman and he is given power to kill with whatever tools he deems appropriate. Nothing is restricted.

For the bulk of this fourth phase of the church – almost a thousand years the Church persecuted and executed whomever and how ever they wanted, on whatever pretext they chose. The authority was given to them, because they did not do most of the killing themselves, instead co-opting state powers to do their will. Nobody would deny that through the inquisition and crusades, the Roman Church was responsible for tens of thousands of deaths; whether they brought the sword down or not. This phase of the Church is truly the darkest age in human history.

Who is riding these Horses?

Some wish to present the rider of the horse in each of these as Jesus himself. I reject that position entirely and absolutely, at least for the last 3 horses, as the authority of the activities of death and destruction are given to the rider of the horses as they go forward. For Jesus to be the rider of these 3 would be an endorsement of their actions and activities, and that I cannot reconcile. For similar reasons, the Holy Spirit cannot be riding these horses.

It is possible that Jesus is riding the first horse, but unlikely. He was and is King, no doubt whatsoever, but he does not need to nor has any interest in conquest. The conquest of the first horse is the spreading of His word, and that spreading is necessary but also not his job. It is the Holy Spirit's job.

The rider also cannot be the Pope for the simple reason than the office did not exist under the first 2 phases of the Church and the authority structure of the church was not so cleanly organised under the 3rd phase.

The fact that, in the 4th Seal, the rider is the personification of Death and that the first rider is not identified with Christ, indicates that this is a reflection of how people living through these phases viewed the Church at those times.

The Church started out as a shining light of God's word, pure and white, but through the crucible of persecution became tainted by sin and adopted whatever practises that it would need to keep itself safe. The value of its message slipped and those looking at the church started to see it wanting for righteousness and virtue until it took up the sword and became a brutal persecuting power that ruled out of fear and not love. When those looked at the high, dark and Gothic buildings during this space of time stared out of fear and met their priests to confess scared about the judgement that they would lay down for their meagre sins.

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

⁹ When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. ¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.*

At the opening of the fifth seal, we see all the Martyrs from all time cry out, begging the Lord to judge the earth. They demand vengeance, something usually not considered a Christian trait. They are given white robes representing their purity and

they are told that they should wait just a little while longer because there are more martyrs to come.

These are angry people, the martyrs representing those who were trampled by the previous 3 horses. We have already discussed that this is a metaphor – as is most of the book of revelation – and there are not any literal souls in Heaven.

That they are told to wait a short space of time – to obviously not be resurrected – is an incredible statement. They appeal to God for vengeance, revenge for a wrong done, and judgement on those who murdered them illegally, and like Job they are told to hold off and wait.

To the Church, the connection to the Reformation is clearly seen. The reformers were those who brought the Roman Church to its knees and they were righteous in demanding justice for themselves and the thousands slaughtered in time.

Change in Meaning

However, it is here that the close-knit connection to the Churches of Chapter 2 and 3 must end. The Seals are obvious judgements on the Church over all time that aligns to the phases of the church, but rather than the rejoicing we find in Chapter 3, here we find that the earlier church is damned by the witnesses of the 5th Seal. This cannot reflect the time period we have related to Philadelphia, but instead we can now change the viewpoint as being a judgment of the Church overall and not just the Church of a time period. We still see the opening phases of the Roman Church – and Christianity more broadly – follow these measures but now we have that church remaining in the state of damnation as a persecuting power.

We can reflect on this and look at the myriad of apostate-protestant Churches that have lead pogroms and persecutions around the world.

- England persecuted Catholics and still has anti-Catholic laws; most notably around succession to the Throne,
- Atheistic France, as previously discussed, slaughtered Catholics during the revolution,
- Ireland has had religious Catholic v Protestant wars in our own time – the troubles,
- The German Reich of the 19th Century passed anti-Catholic laws which Bismarck negotiated repeals of with Pope Leo XIII, breaking with his own party,

- Nazi Germany abolished Catholic political forces and openly executed those who stood against their rule; Maximilian Kolbe being a notable example and made a saint.

While Protestant's don't have as much blood on their hands as Romans, they are VERY far from being clean. This means that we have moved ourselves away from the descriptions of the church as defined by Chapter 2 and 3, and into a broader overview of the Church as a whole.

This also means that the timeframe is broken. The 5th Seal reflected the earth as a whole, not a particular timeframe. The apostate protestant churches that will rule the earth at the end time are, therefore, to be as persecuting as the Roman Church.

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

¹² I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake;

We have a problem here in that it's almost impossible for this language to be symbolic. An earthquake can be used as a simile; "their words were like an earthquake" but we don't have that here. Instead we have similes reflecting on the language used.

An earthquake happens. That's all there is too it. You cannot symbolise that away in the context as we have it here.

Two Viewpoints

There are 2 ways to interpret the 6th Seal. Both have a change in verse 14 when 'probation' closes on the earth. Those not protected by God acknowledge His power, fear His wrath and beg the very earth to swallow them up. The question between these 2 views is about the vents that happen before the heavens roll back as a scroll.

In one view, the events immediately precede the close of probation as a reflection of the power of God declaring it closed. In the other view, they are events to surround the downfall of the Roman Church as a persecuting power that opens the way for Probation to Close and the sealing work to happen. This second has been the traditional viewpoint, and in reality both are valid and supported by the physical evidence. We live today at the separation between verse 13 and 14 of this chapter and so accepting either view makes little difference in the overall interpretation.

While I personally hold the first viewpoint, I respect the traditional aspect and we will evaluate it too.

What is the close of probation?

The extension of salvation cannot be eternal. A point comes when judgement must be poured out on the Earth, as we read in the start of Chapter 7. "After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." The sealing work protects those who are alive on the earth from the judgements that God pours out in preparation for Christ's return. Such judgements are those demanded by the Martyrs of the 5th seal, and those demanded by common sense when looking at they betrayal that the Church has done to Jesus' word. This is not the final judgement; this is a temporal judgement that happens to those living on the earth who have sided with Satan and his power.

But as time is a thing, there is a point when the ability to choose must end. There is a time when the opportunity to accept Jesus' gift of salvation or not, is expended and a 'seal' is fixed to those who are alive and remain. You cannot simply replace a brand on your skin and its almost impossible to replace a tattoo. This end is the entire focus of the Revelator's book. He concludes explaining this in clear and unambiguous language. Chapter 24: ⁶ Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. ⁷ "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." ⁸ Now I, John, saw and heard these things... ¹⁰ And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. ¹¹ He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." This last set of statements is the essence of the close of probation, as we will see in Chapter 7 and 13. Those who choose to lock themselves to God receive his secure, clear seal and inheritance. Those who lock themselves to the Dragon similarly secure his seal and inheritance.

Lisbon Earthquake

So, we need to find a powerful earthquake that rocked the Church and the best candidate for this is the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755.

On all-saints day, 1 November 1755, during mass at 9:40am, a shift happened about 290km south east of Lisbon, causing something between a magnitude 8 and 9 earthquake and aftershocks over several hours. 5-metre holes were ripped all over the centre of the city. The Tsunami that followed engulfed the harbor and downtown area, rushing up the Tagus river "so fast that several people riding on horseback ... were forced to gallop as fast as possible to the upper grounds for fear of being carried away." This was followed by 2 more massive waves, although we are not sure exactly how high. We do know that 20mtr tall Tsunami's swept over North Africa and a 3mtr tall wave hit Cornwall in England.

About 40,000 people were killed, many of which died in the Churches. Almost all church buildings in Lisbon were destroyed with the outliers heavily damaged. Because it was all-saints day, they had left candles burning in their homes, many of which were knocked over but not extinguished by the quake. These lit fires that caused a firestorm that engulfed the city.

Eighty-five percent of Lisbon's buildings were destroyed, including famous palaces and libraries, as well as most examples of Portugal's distinctive 16th-century Manueline architecture. The Royal Ribeira Palace, which stood just beside the Tagus river in the modern square of Terreiro do Paço, was destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami. Inside, the 70,000-volume royal library as well as hundreds of works of art, including paintings by Titian, Rubens, and Correggio, were lost. The royal archives disappeared together with detailed historical records of explorations by Vasco da Gama and other early navigators. The palace of Henrique de Meneses, 3rd Marquis of Lourical, which housed an invaluable library of 18,000 books, was also destroyed.

The damage was not limited to Lisbon, and another 15,000 people died around Spain and North Africa. The earthquake cost between 32 and 48 percent of Portugal's GDP.

Nor was the damage limited to lives and property. Portugal had resisted the reformation up to this point but with this tragedy happening on a religious festival, the idea of judgement came to the forefront of the debate over Protestantism.

Furthermore, the earthquake and its aftermath strongly influenced the intelligentsia of the European Age of Enlightenment. Voltaire used the earthquake in *Candide* and in his *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* ("Poem on the Lisbon disaster"). Voltaire's *Candide* attacks the notion that all is for the best in this, "the best of all possible worlds", a world closely supervised by a benevolent deity. The Lisbon disaster provided a counterexample.

Kant published three separate texts on the Lisbon earthquake and used it as a basis of developing the technology of Seismology.

Hamacher has claimed that the earthquake's consequences extended into the vocabulary of philosophy, making the common metaphor of firm "grounding" for philosophers' arguments shaky and uncertain. Hamacher claimed that the foundational certainty of René Descartes' philosophy ("I think, therefore I am") began to shake following the Lisbon earthquake.

Black Sky

the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.

May 19, 1780 in New England, the United States and large parts of Canada was a weird day when the sun apparently refused to rise. The darkness was so complete that candles were required from noon on. It did not disperse until the middle of the next night. Roosters crowed, woodcocks whistled, and frogs peeped as if night had fallen at 2:00 p.m. in Ipswich, Massachusetts. The moon was bathed in a rich red colour.

The likely cause of the Dark Day was smoke from extensive forest fires mixed with thick fog, and cloud cover. When a fire does not kill a tree and the tree later grows, scar marks are left in the growth rings. This makes it possible to approximate the date of a past fire. Researchers examining tree rings and fire scars in trees in the area that is today occupied by Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, see evidence of a fire in 1780 and attribute the Dark Day to that. The Red moon was because of the absorption spectrum of so much carbon in the air.

A similar event happened in London, during February of 1952, when coal smoke from local power plants and factories mixed with a low-pressure system and snow-heavy clouds to cause an overall darkening of the major part of that metropolis. This undermines this as a proof of the fulfillment of this prophecy but does not dismiss it and this does not count for the Red Moon.

This is also a very common occurrence in the West of NSW – such as Broken Hill – where dust storms can turn the sky black in moments. This also does not, generally, explain the Red Moon

Stars Fall from Heaven

¹³ And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.

The Leonid meteor storm was seen across the United States in the night and early morning of November 12th and 13th, 1833. Those who were awake to witness the storm were in awe as between 50,000 and 150,000 meteors fell each hour. An asteroid called 55P/Tempel–Tuttle, which approaches earth every 33 years – an auspicious number – approached at its closest point mathematically recorded. There had been some references to seeing it in the night sky around the world, but this was the most dramatic as it faces the United States when most of the activity can be seen. This was, therefore, the most dramatic viewing of it in history, although events in the 1960s do compare.

The Alternative View – my view

It is my view that the recorded events above are demonstrations of God's power, but are not directly related to the close of probation. Because of the tremendous speed that events happen in the last days, and the fear that is evinced in the close of probation, I consider that the massive earthquake, black sky, stars falling from heaven all should happen in a much shorter space of time, and happen around the moment when the clean and unclean are declared. This is an interpretation of the text, and is frankly not an important hill to die on.

The above events are certainly demonstrations of God's power; either through his intentional intervention of events or his creation of the laws of physics that made them possible. However, it is simply one of timing that I have a problem with. The drama of the scared people around the world as mentioned next indicates to me that these events would happen in immediate succession – and near 200 years separation has made them less than dramatic. Nevertheless, as we will have to wait until the close of probation itself to prove which is true, there is no point trying to debate it.

Probation Closed

¹⁴ Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. ¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the

throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

The final scene is highest drama and ends with the most dramatic question in the bible. The heavens roll back as a scroll as predicted by Isaiah 34:

Come near, you nations, to hear;
And heed, you people!
Let the earth hear, and all that is in it,
The world and all things that come forth from it.
2 For the indignation of the Lord is against all nations,
And His fury against all their armies;
He has utterly destroyed them,
He has given them over to the slaughter.
3 Also their slain shall be thrown out;
Their stench shall rise from their corpses,
And the mountains shall be melted with their blood.
4 All the host of heaven shall be dissolved,
And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll;
All their host shall fall down
As the leaf falls from the vine,
And as fruit falling from a fig tree.
...
8 For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance,
The year of recompense for the cause of Zion.
9 Its streams shall be turned into pitch,
And its dust into brimstone;
Its land shall become burning pitch.
10 It shall not be quenched night or day;
Its smoke shall ascend forever.
From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
No one shall pass through it forever and ever.
11 But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it,
Also the owl and the raven shall dwell in it.
And He shall stretch out over it
The line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.
12 They shall call its nobles to the kingdom,
But none shall be there, and all its princes shall be nothing.

The drama is backed up by Joel 2:

Joel 2

28 "And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

30 "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
31 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.
32 And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be [m]deliverance,
As the Lord has said,
Among the remnant whom the Lord calls.

And then everything changes. The mountains and islands are rocked and moved, all the great men freak out and race for the hills, demanding nature itself kill them because they are afraid of his wrath. They beg the question, when God is pouring out his anger and judgement on the earth, who can stand up to him?

When God is avenging the Martyrs, who can say they were not part of the persecution?

When God is avenging his church actions, who can say they did not lead men astray?

When God is punishing Satan for leading his people astray, who can say they were not on the side of the tempter?

That is the question for Chapter 7.