

Revelation 6:7-8 the Fourth Seal - The Pale Horse of Death

The Pale Horse — Death, Protection, and Preparation

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Introduction

Revelation 6 unveils four riders sent forth as the first four seals are opened by the Lamb. **This study focuses on the fourth seal — the Pale Horse — and then draws a direct line from prophetic warning to present-day application.** The message is not merely history, nor prophecy for a distant future. It is a call to us, now, to examine our readiness before God.

We will move through four movements:

- **Part 1** — What the Four Horsemen represent
- **Part 2** — The Pale Horse: Death, Hades, and the scope of judgment
- **Part 3** — Who is the audience? Jacob's Trouble and the modern nations of Israel
- **Part 4** — The church's call: Preparation, zeal, and the promise of protection

Part 1 — The Four Horsemen: A Pattern of Cascading Judgment

The four seals follow a clear pattern: a living creature calls, a rider appears, and a devastating power is unleashed. The four horsemen do not arrive independently — they are cumulative and sequential. Each one sets the stage for the next.

The First Seal — The White Horse: False Religion and Deception

Revelation 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 on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." (NKJV)*

The white horse rider deliberately mimics Christ, who also rides a white horse in Revelation 19. This is counterfeit — a false religious system designed to deceive. It is not merely 'false peace' but **false religion, false prophets, and false teaching** that deceive the world. Spiritual deception rides first because a people deceived about God are unprepared for everything that follows.

This aligns with Paul's warning in

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." (NKJV)*

And with the end-time false prophet of Revelation 13, who works alongside the beast performing signs, directing worship, and deceiving the nations. The white horse opens the door to everything that follows.

The Second Seal — The Red Horse: War

Revelation 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 on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword." (NKJV)*

War follows spiritual deception. Nations and peoples unmoored from God's truth turn upon one another. The great sword signifies large-scale, organized warfare — not merely civil unrest.

The Third Seal — The Black Horse: Famine and Economic Hardship

Revelation 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 on 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.'" (NKJV)*

The scales represent the weighing and rationing of food. A denarius was a full day's wage — here it buys only a single quart of wheat. This is **famine**, with severe economic hardship as its companion. War always devastates agriculture and supply systems. The first three horsemen build upon each other: false religion → warfare → famine and economic collapse.

Part 2 — The Pale Horse: Death, Hades, and the Scope of Judgment

Revelation 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 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." (NKJV)*

The Greek Words

χλωρός (chloros) — "Pale." The color of diseased, dying flesh — the sickly yellow-green of a corpse. The only time this word is used for a horse in Scripture. Every other horse color suggests vitality or power. This one carries the color of death itself.

Θάνατος (Thanatos) — "Death." Used here not merely as a concept but as a *proper name* — Death rides as a named agent and actor in history.

ᾍδης (Hades) — "Hades" — the realm of the dead, equivalent to the Hebrew *Sheol*. Death claims the body; Hades claims the soul. They are inseparable companions. Note that both are ultimately destroyed —

Revelation 20:13-14 — *"The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (NKJV)*

The rider of the pale horse has an expiration date. His authority is real but temporary.

ἐδόθη (*edothē*) — "Power was given." This is a *divine passive* — God is the unstated subject. The rider does not seize authority; it is granted within God's sovereign boundaries. Even the worst judgments in history operate within, not outside, the will of God.

The Four Instruments of Death — Ezekiel's Pattern

The four instruments — sword, hunger, death (pestilence), and beasts — are a direct echo of the prophet Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 14:21 — *"For thus says the Lord God: 'How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem — the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence — to cut off man and beast from it?'"* (NKJV)

John is not inventing new imagery — he is bringing the Hebrew prophetic pattern to its eschatological, global climax. This was first addressed as a covenant judgment on Jerusalem (capital of Judah). Revelation expands it to encompass the whole world.

The Fractions: Ezekiel's Thirds and Revelation's One Fourth

The scope of the pale horse's authority — one fourth of the earth — connects to another Ezekiel passage that many will be familiar with:

Ezekiel 5:12 — *"A third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and a third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter a third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them."* (NKJV)

Ezekiel's judgment on Jerusalem involved overlapping thirds — nearly total devastation on the covenant city. Revelation's fourth seal covers *one fourth* of the earth. This is not a contradiction — it reveals a **progression of increasing judgment** as Revelation unfolds:

- **The Seals** → authority over one fourth of the earth
- **The Trumpets** → judgments affecting one third (Revelation 8–9, echoing Ezekiel's thirds)
- **The Bowls** → poured out without limit, total and complete

Even in the fourth seal, God's restraint is visible. Three-fourths remain. The pale horse is devastating — but God has not yet released the full measure of judgment.

Part 3 — The Audience: Jacob's Trouble and the Modern Nations of Israel

Ezekiel's judgments were addressed to Jerusalem — the covenant capital of God's people. This is not incidental. Prophetic judgment in Scripture consistently comes *first* to God's covenant people, and then extends outward to the nations. The primary focus of Jacob's Trouble, at least in its opening phase, falls upon the modern descendants of Jacob — specifically through Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph upon whom Jacob placed his name.

Jeremiah 30:7 — *"Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it."* (NKJV)

Note the name: *Jacob* — whose name was specifically placed upon Ephraim and Manasseh, not upon all twelve tribes equally. When Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons in Genesis 48:16, he declared: *"Let my name be named on them."* It is through these two sons — and their modern descendants, whom our fellowship identifies as the English-speaking peoples of today — that the name Jacob is most specifically carried forward into prophecy.

The foundational text is Genesis 48:16, where the dying Jacob lays his hands on Joseph's two sons and prays:

Genesis 48:16 — *"The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."* (NKJV)

Jacob's name — and therefore Jacob's prophetic identity — was specifically placed upon Ephraim and Manasseh. It is their descendants, the English-speaking peoples of today, upon whom the opening phase of Jacob's Trouble falls most directly. The covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 lay out the progression in detail: disobedience bringing sword, famine, pestilence, and ultimately national captivity. These chapters form the covenant backdrop to everything the four horsemen represent — and they were addressed to Israel specifically before they apply to the wider world.

This pattern follows the biblical principle of Romans 1:16: *"to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."* God's dealings with Israel have always preceded and foreshadowed His dealings with the nations. The tribulation comes first to the modern house of Israel — the English-speaking nations — and then expands to encompass the whole world.

The church of God lives *within* these nations. That is why this study has such direct relevance. The pale horse rides through the world we inhabit. The question is not whether these judgments are coming — the question is whether we will be found prepared.

Part 4 — The Church's Call: Preparation, Zeal, and the Promise of Protection

The second half of this study turns from warning to call. If the four horsemen describe what is coming, Revelation and the words of Christ describe what the church must do — and what God promises to those who are found faithful.

Two Churches — Two Outcomes: Philadelphia and Laodicea

Among the seven churches of Revelation 2–3, two stand in direct contrast as we consider the tribulation period.

Philadelphia — The Faithful, Watching Church:

Revelation 3:10 — *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."* (NKJV)

The Greek phrase is *τηρήσω ἐκ* (*tērēsō ek*) — "keep you from." Significantly, Jesus uses this same construction in John 17:15, where He explicitly says He is *not* asking for believers to be taken *out of* the

world — but kept and protected *within* it. The promise to Philadelphia is divine preservation *through* the trial, not extraction *before* it — consistent with every other protection passage in Revelation.

John 17:15 — *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."* (NKJV)

Laodicea — The Lukewarm, Self-Satisfied Church:

Revelation 3:15-17 — *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."* (NKJV)

Laodicea's defining problem is **presumption without preparation** — the assumption that spiritual status means spiritual readiness. Christ does not affirm that assumption. He rebukes it sharply and offers a remedy:

Revelation 3:18-19 — *"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."* (NKJV)

The Greek for "be zealous" is *ζήλεue* (*zēleue*) — present active imperative, continuous action: *keep being zealous*. The remedy Christ offers Laodicea is **gold refined in fire** — genuine faith tested through difficulty (*1 Peter 1:7*) — **white garments** — righteousness of character — and **anointed eyes** — spiritual perception. Laodicea, like the foolish virgins, discovers its poverty too late unless it repents now.

The Ten Virgins — Preparation Cannot Be Borrowed

Matthew 25:1-2 — *"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish."* (NKJV)

Matthew 25:3-4 — *"Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."* (NKJV)

Matthew 25:10-12 — *"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'"* (NKJV)

Matthew 25:13 — *"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."* (NKJV)

The ten virgins share everything in common: the same calling, the same lamps, the same intention, the same direction. The only difference is the **oil**. Oil in Scripture is consistently associated with the Holy Spirit — with sustained, Spirit-filled life. The wise had a reserve supply; the foolish assumed their lamps would suffice.

The most sobering detail: **oil cannot be transferred**. When the foolish ask to share, the wise reply that there is not enough for both. Spiritual preparedness is not transferable — your pastor's prayers do not substitute for your own oil supply. Your family's faith does not cover you. Readiness is personal, cultivated over time, not manufactured in the crisis moment.

The door closes. Preparation has a window. The tribulation is not the time to begin preparing — it is the context that reveals whether preparation has already happened.

The Wilderness Protection — Revelation 12

Revelation 12 gives us the clearest picture of how God protects His people during the tribulation. The woman — representing the faithful covenant community — is not raptured to heaven. She is sheltered on earth, in the wilderness, by direct divine provision.

Revelation 12:6 — *"Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days."* (NKJV)

"A place prepared by God" — τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον (*topon hētoimasmenon*) — the same verb Jesus uses in John 14:2: *"I go to prepare a place for you."* God does not improvise protection. He prepares it in advance. The wilderness echoes Israel's forty years of divine sustenance — manna, water from the rock, the pillar of cloud. It is a place *outside normal human systems of provision*, where God alone is the source.

Revelation 12:14 — *"But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent."* (NKJV)

"Wings of a great eagle" is unmistakably Exodus language. God's own description of the Exodus deliverance in Exodus 19:4:

Exodus 19:4 — *"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself."* (NKJV)

The Exodus is the prototype for end-time deliverance. God did not spare Israel from the wilderness — He sustained them *through* it and brought them out the other side into inheritance. The 1,260 days (three and a half years) is a defined, limited duration. The serpent's reach is real — but it is bounded. The woman is protected *from the presence of the serpent* — not removed from the earth, but shielded within it.

Worthy to Escape — Luke 21:36

Jesus Himself gives the church its present posture in the face of these events:

Luke 21:36 — *"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."* (NKJV)

The word for "escape" is *ἐκφυγεῖν* (*ekphugein*) — to flee out from, to escape completely. But the context of the same discourse in Luke 21 shows what this escape looks like — it is flight, geographic movement, like the woman fleeing to the wilderness. Earlier in the same chapter Jesus says:

Luke 21:20-21 — *"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her."* (NKJV)

The escape pattern Christ describes in His own discourse is *movement on earth* — consistent with the wilderness refuge of Revelation 12 — not heavenly extraction.

"Counted worthy" — *καταξιωθῆτε* (*kataxiōthēte*) — is not automatic. It is tied to watching and praying. It implies the same character condition commended to Philadelphia: patient, persevering faithfulness.

Worthiness is cultivated beforehand, not manufactured in the moment.

Conclusion — Making It Personal

The pale horse and his companions are coming. The fractions tell the story: one fourth in the seals, one third in the trumpets, total in the bowls. The judgments begin closest to home — with the modern descendants of Jacob, the English-speaking nations — and then spread to all the earth. The church of God lives within these nations and will not be insulated from the world's trajectory by geography or denomination alone.

Two paths stand before every person who calls themselves part of God's people:

The Laodicean path: lukewarm, self-sufficient, presuming on status without cultivating zeal. Gold untested by fire. Lamps with no reserve oil. This path leads into the tribulation unprepared — the very fire that refined gold may be the only refiner left.

The Philadelphian path: watching, praying always, keeping His word, zealous and repentant. Oil maintained. Eyes open. This is the path of those who are found worthy — who receive the eagle's wings, the prepared wilderness place, the divine keeping *through* the hour of trial.

This is not prophecy for another age. It is a mirror held up to us today. The question the pale horse asks is simple: **Are you ready?**

Discussion Questions for Personal and Group Study

1. The white horse represents spiritual deception that rides *first*. What false religious ideas or teachings do you see gaining influence in the world today? How do we guard ourselves against being deceived?

2. The divine passive — "power was given" — appears repeatedly in the seal judgments, reminding us that even catastrophic events unfold within God's sovereign permission. How does that truth help you process suffering and world events? How does it challenge you?

3. Oil in the parable of the ten virgins represents Spirit-filled, sustained spiritual life that cannot be borrowed. What are the practical disciplines in your life that maintain your "oil supply"? What threatens to deplete it?
4. Laodicea's root problem was self-sufficiency — assuming it had what it needed when it did not. Where in your spiritual life might you be assuming readiness rather than actively cultivating it?
5. The promised protection is consistently described as preservation *through* trial rather than removal *from* it. How does that shape the way you think about faith, suffering, and God's faithfulness?
6. Luke 21:36 commands us to "pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape." Is this a posture you carry daily? What would it look like to make this a consistent, living prayer in your life?

Key Scriptures for Further Study This Week

- **Revelation 6:1-8** — The four seals and four horsemen
- **Revelation 3:7-22** — The churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea
- **Revelation 12:6, 14** — The woman in the wilderness
- **Revelation 20:13-14** — Death and Hades cast into the lake of fire
- **Matthew 25:1-13** — The parable of the ten virgins
- **Luke 21:20-36** — Jesus' Olivet Discourse on end-time readiness
- **Jeremiah 30:7** — The time of Jacob's Trouble (Ephraim and Manasseh)
- **Ezekiel 5:12** — The third judgment on Jerusalem
- **Ezekiel 14:21** — The four severe judgments
- **Genesis 48:14-20** — Jacob places his name on Ephraim and Manasseh
- **Deuteronomy 28; Leviticus 26** — Covenant blessings and curses; the pattern behind the four horsemen
- **2 Thessalonians 2:3-4** — The falling away and the man of sin
- **Exodus 19:4** — Eagles' wings and the Exodus prototype
- **1 Peter 1:7** — Faith refined as gold through fire