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*This is the world,
brutal and cruel, that Troy tried to withstand.
Cruelty wins in the end.
Our little clearings of civilization may seem real,
but mindless wilderness always lurks,
may take its time,
but in the end overwhelms all our pretensions to decency.
We revert to beastliness. (Seneca, Trojan Women, Lines 985-990)*

the four horsemen of the apocalypse—part 1 of 5

General observations

Revelation 6.¹⁻⁸

¹*I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures invite, with a voice like thunder, “Come!”*

²*Then I saw—imagine this! —a white horse. Its rider held a military bow and was granted a crown. He went off triumphantly, intending to conquer.*

³*And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature invite, “Come!”*

⁴*And another horse, this one red, went off, its rider given power to take peace from the earth to the extent that they kill each other. He was equipped with a vicious sword.^a*

⁵*And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature invite, “Come!”*

Then I saw—imagine this! —a black horse. Its rider held a set of scales in his hand. ⁶I heard something like a voice coming from the four creatures, announcing: “A quart of wheat^b or three quarts^c of barley^d costs a day’s wage,^e while olive oil and wine you are not to impact.”

⁷*And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature invite, “Come!”*

⁸*And I saw—imagine this! —a pallid horse. As for its rider, his name was Death, and hell accompanied him. And he was given dominion over a large swath^f of the planet to slay with the sword and with starvation and with death and with earth’s wild beasts.¹*

Introduction

When we turn our thoughts to the Book of Revelation, we, naturally enough, think mostly of John’s apocalyptic vision, which begins with the Lamb’s breaking of the first seal that shields from unworthy eyes the contents of the scroll that God holds in his right hand while

¹ Author’s translation.

he sits enthroned in his heavenly throne room. But, before that first seal is broken, five entire chapters have passed.

John begins his work with a brief introduction (1.¹⁻³). This is followed by a general letter written to seven churches in Asia, or modern-day Turkey (1.⁴⁻²⁰), and a follow up letter written to each of these churches individually (2.¹⁻³.²²). John then records his vision of God, who sat enthroned in his heavenly throne room into which the Revelator is graciously invited (4.¹⁻⁵.¹⁴). This vision includes John's view of the scroll that God held in hand, and the coming of Jesus, appearing as a sacrificial lamb, who, alone among humanity's billions and billions, was up to the challenge of opening, reading, and revealing the scroll's content.⁸

This final Book of the Bible is, without doubt, a fascinating work. It has inspired varied and multiple feelings, from awe to contempt to confusion to fear and dread. The early Church father, Jerome, for example, once wrote of the Book of Revelation,

“The Apocalypse of John has as many secrets as words. I am saying less than the book deserves. It is beyond all praise; for multiple meanings lie hidden in each single word.”²

Martin Luther, on the other hand, never one for pulling punches or mincing words, complained, “My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book.”³ In my own LDS tradition, the first Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith, once stated, “The book of Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written.” One suspects he was, here, acting the part of jester, as he was wont to do; for no one in their right mind would seriously present the Book of Revelation as a “plain” book, let alone “one of the plainest” books ever written. Indeed, as we will see, Joseph, himself, seemed unable to make up his mind concerning the Book's meaning on several fronts.

As I have confessed elsewhere, I avoided the Book for the first 55 years of my life. My feelings toward the Book ran along the lines of Martin Luther's, and most certainly did not jive with those of Joseph Smith, playing stand-up comic or not. However, shamed by my

² Ep. liii.9; found in Caird, 2

³ Found in Caird, 2

cowardice, I finally decided to give the Book a whorl. After dozens of readings, consideration of others' perspectives, and much thought, my feelings toward the Book have gravitated to something more akin to those expressed by Jerome. The Book is still by no means easy. Certainly not "one of the plainest books God caused to be written." But I find myself returning to it over and over again for inspiration and guidance—and, perhaps, just a tad bit of titillation.

Revelation's dragons, demons, composite and fanciful creatures, and false prophets have long fascinated readers. The visual arts and imaginative literature of the western world are filled with their images and descriptions. But few of the Revelator's images have captivated readers' imagination more than that of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." Interpretation of these four horsemen has been varied and multitudinous.

Today's homily is the first of five dedicated to these famous four horsemen. I understand if the reader wonders at the need for or wisdom in my giving the four horsemen another look-see. My interpretation will not be unlike or independent of some before me. Yet, I may hit a few notes that strike a new chord for the reader. To my knowledge, my interpretation is unrepresented in LDS tradition and interpretation. However, for me it does what I believe the Revelator meant it to do.

First, the Revelator wished to describe the nature of a world ruled and governed by fallen people and satanic principles—the world that we have inherited from our fathers, the world in which we live now, and the world we are, for better or worse, preparing to pass along to another generation (a generation that hopefully will be wiser than those that have passed before them). Second, the Revelator wished to help his readers imagine a world ruled and governed by God and his principles. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the Revelator intended his book to be a call to action, action that would translate the world from one governed by satanic principles to one governed by godly principles—indeed, by God Himself.

The priority of the Revelator's didactic purposes is seen by the placement of his first of seven macarisms—or statements of blessedness—in his introductory remarks.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, *and keep those things which are written therein*: for the time is at hand.”⁴

His book not only calls upon his readers to understand the tragic present and imagine a better future, but to actively work against the former and agitate for the latter. It is a call to action. Failure to understand, to imagine, and to act would certainly permit the needless continuation of pain, destruction, death, and perdition the Revelator so well portrays.

Our first task, then, is to understand the nature of the world as the Revelator perceives it. He begins his description of “the world” in the first four seals with their respective horse and rider. In this homily, we will make some general observations about these four scenes. In the four homilies that follow, we will examine each of the horses—white, red, black, and pale—in turn.

General observations

It will, perhaps, come as no surprise that in seeking to understand the Book of Revelation I began inside my own tradition. Nor should it come as a surprise that since it is the four horsemen that begin the apocalypse proper, I began with them.

In March of 1832, Joseph Smith offered an interpretation of the scroll’s seven seals in response to questions members of the Church posed to him.

- Q. What are we to understand by the book which John saw, which was sealed on the back with seven seals?
- A. We are to understand that it contains the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence.

⁴ Revelation 1.³, emphasis added

- Q. “What are we to understand by the seven seals with which it was sealed?”
- A. “We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh.”⁵

We learn, first, that the sealed book “contains... things” from “the seven thousand years of [earth’s] continuance, or its temporal existence.”

All righty, then. I run, already, smack dab into my first difficulty. I concluded many, many years ago that the earth’s “temporal existence” was far, far older than seven thousand years. There were indeed dinosaurs trudging around the planet millions of years ago—and, no, they weren’t lodged on Noah’s mythical ark. Furthermore, I long ago accepted the fact that I had ancestors who lived much longer ago than seven thousand years. The world over, there were, to use a humble example, numerous well organized and permanent agriculture settlements 9, 10, 12 thousand years ago.

Many dozens of years ago, I read a series of books entitled, *The First Thousand Years*, *The Second Thousand Years*, etc. Even though they were obviously based upon what I consider to be a faulty Usher-type chronology, I learned a thing or two from them. So, I decided not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I pressed on, believing that I could probably find a work-around this initial and disappointing difficulty concerning earth’s age.

But, for me, Joseph’s explanation contained a second stumbling block. When it came to the seals, Joseph asserted that they contained “things” related to 1,000-year periods: the first seal containing “things” related to the first 1,000 years of the earth’s “temporal existence,” the second seal “things,” related to the second 1,000 years, etc. This meant, for example, that the white horse and its rider represented some “thing” relating to the first thousand years, the red horse and its rider, to some “thing” relating to the second thousand years, etc. Of course, I wondered what those “things” could be.

As I dug around a little more—after all, are not two witnesses better than just one? —I found

⁵ DC 77.⁶⁻⁷

that a little more than a decade after Joseph had offered his interpretation in the Doctrine and Covenants he had another look at Revelation. Among other things, he stated,

“The things which John saw had no allusion to the scenes of the days of Adam, Enoch, Abraham or Jesus, only so far as is *plainly represented by John, and clearly set forth by him.*”⁶

Hmmm. If the first seal with its horse and rider “contained” “things” relating to the first thousand years of the earth’s “temporal existence,” then it must, of necessity have some “allusion” to “scenes of the days of Adam” and/or “Enoch” for they lived during that first thousand years of traditional Biblical chronology—a traditional and questionable chronology Joseph clearly accepted. However, I had to ask myself, “How ‘plainly represented... and clearly set forth’ are Adam, Enoch, or some other figure from that ‘first thousand year’ period in Revelation’s white horse and rider?”

The answer is probably already obvious to you: “Not very.”

Correction.

Not at all! If you had been living in the time of John and had read about the white horse and its rider, what are the chances that you would have said, “Oh, yes, I see... Why, it’s as clear as day: this is a clear and unmistakable ‘allusion’ to Enoch.” Or, “Yes, clearly this is an ‘allusion’ to Adam”?

The chances are slim to none, I’m thinking.

Imagine, then, my surprise when, upon further investigation, I learned that the rider on the white horse was an allusion to Enoch, according to Bruce R. McConkie, one of the most dominate and doctrinaire theologians in LDS Church history.⁷ But, how “plainly represented” and how “clearly set forth” is Enoch in the imagery of the white horse?

⁶ HC Vol. 5, p. 341-342. Emphasis added.

⁷ See *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 3, p. 476-78

I just have to say, John most certainly did not “plainly represent” or “clearly set forth” how the rider of the white horse was a representation of a scene from the first thousand years in general, or a scene from Enoch’s lifetime in particular. Not even a smidgin.^h

Things were not adding up for me. Not at all. The more I read, the more LDS interpretation of the four horsemen failed to meet the smell test. But, more significantly, if I applied the test of meaningfulness, usefulness, and applicability of John’s challenge that we act upon what we learn from his work, the interpretation failed even more miserably. I could go on. But, to make a long story short, as I worked my way through Revelation and examined interpretations from my own LDS culture, I continued to face what were for me insurmountable difficulties.

So, after many months, I turned to and began to dig my way through millennia of Christian interpretation. I could write pages and pages of commentary about what I learned here. Much of it was rational, clear and, useful.⁸ I found some of the interpretations as useless as that found in my tradition. One interpretation—here I am thinking of interpretations that begin with the assertion that Jesus is the rider on the first, white horse⁹—was more than useless. It was almost blasphemous as it turned Jesus into an agent of the suffering, hunger, and death that follow with the remaining three horsemen. More on this later.

In the end, the best thing that both LDS and the various non-LDS interpretations provided was confidence; confidence to decide for myself by interacting faithfully, personally, and intimately with the text itself.

⁸ Not surprising since 1) Christianity has had 2000 years to explore and ponder, and 2) a Mormonism infantile in comparison has stubbornly refused to consider this 2000-year history, choosing, rather, to go it alone and attempt to reinvent the wheel all over again.

⁹ Driven more, perhaps, from a sort of obsessive-compulsive mindset than anything else, such interpreters justify this interpretation by pointing to the fact that Jesus rides a white horse later in Revelation. But the symbolism of the poet can be far more diversified than is often appreciated.

I do not claim to have the one and only true interpretation of the Book as a whole, or of the four horsemen in particular. Each reader must, of course, decide for him or herself. But following are a few things that I decided about the Book of Revelations as a whole, and the four horsemen of the apocalypse in particular. This is what works for me. These are the sorts of decisions that will guide us as we make our way through the four horsemen of the apocalypse in the four homilies that follow.

1. One of John's primary intentions was to describe the world as he knew and experienced it. This was a world governed by satanic impulses. The world that he knew and experienced is, with very few significant existential differences, the same world that has been passed to us today.
2. Equal in importance with his first intention, John also imagined and sought to portray an alternate reality. In this alternate reality the world's inhabitants reject and are delivered from satanic governance. They are presented and accept the governance of God, thus adopting principles and behaviors consistent with the character of God and godly governance.
3. In describing the world as it is and as it might be, John was not acting the part of educator, philosopher, theologian, doctrinaire, etc. His was not a simple descriptive task. Rather, John was acting as a pastor. In his role as pastor, he sought to make his instruction meaningful and useful in his readers' daily life, be they of any and every era. He intended those who read his Book to apply its principles to their lives. In his Book, John was issuing a call to repent and reform. His is a call to action.

In regard to the four horsemen specifically, these are a few general principles upon which I decided.

1. After reading and rereading Rev 6.¹⁻⁸ dozens and dozens of times and thinking and pondering for many hours over many, many months, the notion that the four

horsemen represented singular events or individuals restricted to single historical eras became, for me, untenable. Such interpretations were hollow, meaningless, and without utility. They issued no call to action and so left the present evil age safely intact.¹⁰

2. Rather than understanding the horses and riders of the first four seals as one-off occurrences— “scenes” only from “the first thousand years,” “the second thousand years,” etc. of earth’s “temporal existence”—they should be understood as patterns or types. In each horse and rider, John was describing attitudes, desires, behaviors, and consequences that have played themselves out at the national level countless times in every age over the entire course of human history; the world as it has been and is.
3. Most interpretations assume that some type of unified “plot line” runs through the four horsemen. Joseph Smith’s “plot line” was one in which events moved from one age to the next, to the next, etc. Interpretations that propose Jesus is the rider on the white horse, assume that the following three riders are, in one way or another, consequences of his initial foray in the first seal.

I, too, will posit a unified plot line running through the four horsemen. The purpose of the following homilies is to demonstrate and examine that plot line. But to be brief, following is the “plot line” I will propose and examine:

1st Seal

The rider of the white horse represents the personal and nationalist will-to-power, the desire to excel, conquer, and dominate.

2nd Seal

The rider of the red horse represents the conflict that inevitably breaks out when one individual or group seek to dominate others.

¹⁰¹⁰ One wonders, at times, if deliverance of this present evil age from the ravages of the Revelator’s critiques is, in fact, the point.

3rd Seal

The rider of the black horse represents the consequences of violent national conflict, specifically, the economic costs to societies.

4th Seal

The rider of the black horse represents the social and spiritual devastation of violence that spirals out of human control as a result of nations having yielded to the desire to dominate which leads to engagement in devastating military conflicts.

The reading that I will give to the four horsemen of the apocalypse is one that is, for me, most meaningful and, even more importantly, most useful and applicable to my life (Indeed, as I study scripture, this meaningfulness, relevance, usefulness, and present application is as important as the insights that come from the indispensable tools we utilize to critically examine the historical and textual context of scripture passages). Through the revelator's four horsemen, I better understand the nature of the world that surrounds me. I better understand the foundation upon which a better world, if it is to be, must be built. I better understand the responsibility I have to act.

I write this series of homilies on the four horsemen to answer, in part, John's call to action. In them, I do more than discuss and describe and interpret. In them, I describe, I challenge, I oppose, I resist this present evil age with its well-established satanic impulses. I do so with the hope that, with God's gracious assistance, we can establish a better world.

Hopefully, the reader will also find that the following homilies inform their understanding and perception of the world around them, and, having informed them, guide their response to that world as they seek to fulfil the Savior's commission that his disciples be a "light of the world."¹¹

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those

¹¹ Matthew 5.¹⁴

things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”¹²

Even so, come, Lord, Jesus.

^a The *machaira* is a “short sword,” one that can be wielded with one arm. As a “large” sword would require two hands and thus no longer qualify as a *machaira*, it would seem best to understand the modifying, *me gas*, as indicative of something other than size. The word can also indicate quality. Hence, my “hardened.” However one translates it, the sword is an extraordinarily effective and brutal instrument of death.

^b Barely enough for one person.

^c Barely enough to feed a small family.

^d Less nutritious than wheat.

^e Several times more expensive than normal.

^f Literally, “a fourth.”

^g Following is my outline for the entire Book of Revelation

1. ¹⁻³	Introduction
1. ⁴⁻²⁰	Letter to the Seven Churches—Universal
2. ^{1-3, 22}	Letter to the Seven Churches—Individual
2. ¹⁻⁷	Ephesus
2. ⁸⁻¹¹	Smyrna
2. ¹²⁻¹⁷	Pergamus
2. ¹⁸⁻²⁹	Thyatira
3. ¹⁻⁶	Sardis
3. ⁷⁻¹³	Philadelphia
3. ¹⁴⁻²²	Laodicia
4. ^{1-5, 14}	John Joins the Assembly in the Divine Throne Room
4. ¹⁻¹¹	Revelation of God’s Majesty
5. ¹⁻¹⁴	Revelation of Christ’s Worthiness
6. ^{1-11, 19}	Revelation of the Seven Seals
6. ¹⁻²	1 st Seal Opened
6. ³⁻⁴	2 nd Seal Opened
6. ⁵⁻⁶	3 rd Seal Opened
6. ⁷⁻⁸	4 th Seal Opened
6. ⁹⁻¹¹	5 th Seal Opened
6. ¹²⁻¹⁷	6 th Seal Opened
7. ¹⁻¹⁷	Interlude: Who shall be able to stand?
8. ¹⁻⁶	7 th Seal Opened
8. ⁷	1 st Trump Sounded
8. ⁸⁻⁹	2 nd Trump Sounded
8. ¹⁰⁻¹¹	3 rd Trump Sounded
8. ¹²⁻¹³	4 th Trump Sounded
9. ¹⁻¹¹	5 th Trump Sounded
9. ¹²⁻²¹	6 th Trump Sounded

¹² Revelation 1.³

10. ¹⁻¹¹	Interlude: John's Call to Prophecy
11. ¹⁻¹⁴	Interlude: Two Additional Prophets Called to Prophecy
11. ¹⁵⁻¹⁹	7 th Trump Sounded
12. ^{1-16.21}	Revelation of the Seven Wonders
12. ¹⁻²	1 st Wonder—Woman Clothed with the Sun
12. ³⁻⁶	2 nd Wonder—A Great Red Dragon
12. ⁷⁻¹²	3 rd Wonder—War in Heaven
12. ¹³⁻¹⁷	4 th Wonder—War on Earth
13. ¹⁻¹⁰	5 th Wonder—A Beast Rises up from the Sea
13. ¹¹⁻¹⁸	6 th Wonder—A Beast Rises up from the Earth
14. ¹⁻²⁰	Interlude: Seven Angels
14. ¹⁻⁵	Introduction
14. ⁶⁻⁷	1 st Angel
14. ⁸	2 nd Angel
14. ⁹⁻¹²	3 rd Angel
14. ¹³	4 th Angel
14. ¹⁴⁻¹⁶	5 th Angel
14. ¹⁷	6 th Angel
14. ¹⁸⁻²⁰	7 th Angel
15. ^{1-16.21}	7 th Wonder—Seven Angels Bear Seven Vial of Wrath
15. ^{1-16.1}	The Seven Vial Bearing Angels in Heaven
16. ²	1 st Angel Pours 1 st Vial out upon the Earth
16. ³	2 nd Angel Pours 2 nd Vial out upon the Sea
16. ⁴⁻⁷	3 rd Angel Pours 3 rd Vial out upon Fresh Waters
16. ⁸⁻⁹	4 th Angel Pours 4 th Vial out upon the Sun
16. ¹⁰⁻¹¹	5 th Angel Pours 5 th Vial out upon the Seat of the Beast
16. ¹²⁻¹⁶	6 th Angel Pours 6 th Vial out upon the Euphrates
16. ¹⁷⁻²¹	7 th Angel Pours 7 th Vial out into the Air
17. ^{1-19.10}	Revelation of Babylon's Fall
17. ¹⁻¹⁸	Description of Babylon's Character
18. ¹⁻³	1 st Lament/Taunt
18. ⁴⁻⁸	2 nd Lament/Taunt
18. ⁹⁻¹⁰	3 rd Lament/Taunt
18. ^{11-17a}	4 th Lament/Taunt
18. ^{17b-18}	5 th Lament/Taunt
18. ¹⁹⁻²⁰	6 th Lament/Taunt
18. ²¹⁻²⁴	7 th Lament/Taunt
19. ¹⁻²	1 st Affirmation
19. ³	2 nd Affirmation
19. ⁴	3 rd Affirmation
19. ⁵	4 th Affirmation
19. ⁶⁻⁸	5 th Affirmation
19. ^{9 a, b}	6 th Affirmation
19. ^{9 c-10}	7 th Affirmation
19. ^{11-22.5}	The Twelve Concluding Visions
19. ¹¹⁻¹⁶	1 st Vision—The Righteous Commander and his Hosts
19. ¹⁷⁻¹⁸	2 nd Vision—The Supper of the Great God
19. ¹⁹⁻²¹	3 rd Vision—The Rebellious are Vanquished
20. ¹⁻³	4 th Vision—The Rebellious go into the Bottomless Pit
20. ⁴⁻¹⁰	5 th Vision—A Thousand Years
20. ¹¹	6 th Vision—A Great White Throne
20. ¹²⁻¹⁵	7 th Vision—Judgment

21. ¹	8 th Vision—A New Heaven and a New Earth
21. ²⁻⁸	9 th Vision—The New Jerusalem
21. ⁹⁻²¹	10 th Vision—Description of Holy Jerusalem
21. ²²⁻²⁷	11 th Vision—The Presence of God in Holy Jerusalem
22. ¹⁻⁵	12 th Vision—The River and Tree of Life
22. ⁶⁻²¹	Epilogue

^h Various apologetics have been marshaled to explain the discrepancy.

1. “Without granting a discrepancy, we must rely upon the explanation found in the Doctrine and Covenants because it has been ‘canonized.’”
2. “Granting a discrepancy, we must rely upon the explanation found in the Doctrine and Covenants because it has been ‘canonized.’”
3. “Though I cannot explain it, there is no discrepancy. I’m sure a truly inspired teacher/prophet could explain what is only an *apparent* contradiction.”
4. “There is no discrepancy. Period. No further discussion needed.”
5. “There is no discrepancy. Both statements are true. The first seal, for example, represents a ‘scene’ from the days of Enoch. For those with the Spirit, it is ‘plainly represented by John, and clearly set forth by him.’”

I find all of these unsatisfactory—some more so than others (4 being, for me, by far the least palatable). For example, one might be excused for finding it difficult to see in the white horse a representation or scene from the life of Enoch—a common interpretation. Such an interpretation is surely not “plainly represented” or “clearly set forth” by the Apostle. Additionally, Enoch fought with the “word of God,” not with weapons of human invention. Nowhere in the Enoch material do we have him riding a white horse or have any white horse imagery. There is, then, no reason to connect “white horse” and “Enoch” except as an article of faith without scripture support

Further, the degree to which such interpretations are not “plainly represented” or “clearly set forth” can be seen from the following. Bruce R. McConkie asked, “Who rode the red horse, the red horse of war and bloodshed and a sword, during the second seal?” His uncertain and tentative answer is instructive: “Perhaps it was the devil himself.... Or if it was not Lucifer, perhaps it was a man of blood, or *a person representing many murdering warriors*” (*DNTC*, Vol. 3, p. 478). What’s the point? And how plain and clear is all that? It’s a multiply choice test!

There are, it seems, other questions. Here are a few we might ask.

1. If each seal simply contains one salient event that took place during a single thousand-year period, shouldn’t the fifth seal find as its most significant event the birth of the Savior or his atonement—something having to do with the Savior? How can such an event simply be ignored in a survey, which purports to record “the most transcendent happenings” of each dispensation? (See McConkie, p. 477)
3. What is the message? Is it just historical narrative? What was the church then, or the church now, to do with the historical narrative, especially when it is not even entirely clear what history is being referred to?

The questions could go on. I am satisfied that Joseph Smith was a bold explorer. Joseph Smith made both of the above statements attributed to him. The statements were made 10 years apart. A lot can happen in 10 years. One’s knowledge grows. In his growth, Joseph saw things in 1843 that he did not see in 1832. Joseph needn’t be exactly on point at each moment on every matter. No prophet does. No prophet has been. No prophet is.

All of this may convince some readers that it is a good thing that today’s prophets don’t seem interested in commenting on such obscure, “esoteric” passages—though, as we will see, there is nothing esoteric about the four horsemen of the apocalypse. I, too, find myself content with the fact that today’s Church leaders don’t give a hoot about such matters, though, if I am honest, I’d feel a lot better about it if they were not so

completely obsessed with all things gay, especially their war against gay marriage.

the four horsemen of the apocalypse—part 2 of 5

the white horse and its rider

Revelation 6.¹⁻⁸

Introduction

After fearfully avoiding the Book of Revelation for nearly six decades of my life and, finally, shamed by my cowardice, I decided to face my fears and dive into the Book. How glad I am. I have learned so very much.

With the Revelator's guidance, and in accordance with scripture's power to discern "the thoughts and intents of the heart,"¹ I have learned a thing or two about myself. In addition, I have learned much about the world in which we all find ourselves—a world all too often driven by satanic impulses it seems unable to control. I have learned much about the alternative reality that John discerned through inspiration and revelation—an imagined world in which God rules the hearts and minds of its inhabitants. I have learned that I am expected to do far more than read and understand the Revelator's discerning insights into this world driven by the impulses of the dark "prince of this world,"² or of the world as it can be under the enlightened direction of the "prince of peace."³ I am to act. I am to confront and resist the satanic world as it exists. I am to labor in assisting in the establishment of the Kingdom of God as it can be.

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."⁴

The Book of Revelation is, then, above all else, a call to action. But inspired and effective action requires a knowledge of what really is and can be. If we are to resist the evils of this

¹ See Hebrews 4.¹²

² See John 14.³⁰

³ See Isaiah 9.⁶

⁴ Revelation 1.³

world and assist in the building up of the kingdom of God, we must understand the opposing principles upon which the two worlds are built. With the opening of the first seal in Revelation 6, John's apocalypse begins in earnest, and, with it, the beginning of his tutorial concerning the world as it is.

This is how I understand the "four horsemen of the apocalypse." This understanding will guide my interpretation of each. They represent a description of this world as it has existed throughout human history, before and since the ministry of John. They represent a description of the world until such time as its inhabitants decide that they have had enough of insanity and seek the Lord's help to undo it; until such time as they discard the vile image of Satan and seek renewal with and in the image of God.

In Part 1 of this series of homilies on the four horsemen of the apocalypse, we made a number of observations about the Book of Revelation in general and the four horsemen in particular. In today's homily, we turn our attention specifically to the first seal's white horse and its rider. We will first examine the symbolism of the white horse itself. We will then consider the horse's rider, with his military bow, crown, and stated intentions. As we mine these symbols for their meaning, we will draw some conclusions as to their meaning within the framework of John's apocalypse in general and in the scenes involving the four horsemen in particular. We will then utilize two real life, real time, historical narratives to illustrate the principles John seeks to unveil through the white horse and its rider.

With these introductory remarks, we now turn to the first seal with its white horse and rider.

The white horse and rider

It will seem too obvious when we say that John's long and detailed apocalypse begins with the white horse and its lone rider of the first seal. But it might not be so obvious when we assert that everything in the vision that follows this horse and its rider flows from and is a direct consequence of this horse, its horseman, and the spirit they represent. Without this horse and rider, there would be no apocalypse. There would be no need. For the need to

educate, warn, and correct human society through apocalypse would largely erode with the absence of this horse and rider.

No doubt, the reader will require an explanation for such a big assertion. I hope to provide it in the homilies that follow.

Our eyes are first drawn to and immediately fix upon a gorgeous white horse. It doesn't really matter whether John saw a pure white horse or one that is merely whitest-gray. He is a poet. He knows his readers and uses that knowledge to his advantage. He knows that when his readers read "white horse" they will imagine the purest and whitest of horses. You tell me, am I wrong? Is this not what you imagined, whatever your interpretation might be? Well, you are not alone, as any Google image search, "White horse of the apocalypse," will demonstrate.

White horses are not common. Just watch tapes of the Kentucky Derby over the past, say, twenty years if you don't believe me. Due to their rarity, white horses have often been highly valued, both in terms of human interest and monetary worth. Due to their expensiveness, possession has nearly always been limited to the wealthy and powerful. White horses were rarely found pulling plows, wagons, or other farm implements. The wealthy and powerful often utilized them as a symbol of their prestige, wealth, and power. This was certainly true in Roman times, the time of the Revelator.

This provides our first clue as to the character of the horse's rider. He is wealthy and powerful, possessing the resources to purchase or the clout/brutality to confiscate the white horse.

The rider's possession of a military bow tells us that he is a military man. This military man's horse tells us that he is a calvary man, rather than an infantry man. Because pre-modern governments and armies did not supply the calvary man's horse, ancient calvaries were composed of rich men who could enlist with their own mounts. They owned their own

military-worthy horses and brought them to the battle.⁵ This confirms our rider as a wealthy man.

So, our rider is a wealthy, influential citizen. Like all wealthy and influential men, he is undoubtedly accustomed to getting his way. The Hebrew Psalmist captures the essence of such men as well as anyone.

“Even in death, they experience no suffering,
but die with stomachs full.
They do not experience the hardships of common people,
nor are they struck as others are struck.
This is why they wear their self-conceit as a neckless;
envelope themselves in a garment of cruelty.
Their eyes bug out on account of their beefiness;
their physique boggles the mind.

They are disdainful and promote wanton oppression.
Their rhetoric is ever so soaring.
They claim divine license;
their assertions are found the world over.
This is why peoples keep turning to them;
why, as overflowing water, they flow to them.
They say, “How could God know?
How could ‘Elyôn possess any awareness?”
In summary: these are the impious;
ever secure, always increasing in wealth.”⁶

The rider of the white horse, however, possesses another telling article. He wears a crown that has been “given to” or “granted” him. Thus, our rider is something more than a common

⁵ This was still often true during the American Civil War, during the American “Indian” wars, and the wars over Texas independence. It was true of Teddy Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders,” who were little more than rich white men engaging in capitalistic plundering and despoiling of brown people.

⁶ Psalm 73.⁴⁻¹²; author’s translation

military man. Something more, even, than a wealthy and privileged calvary man. He is a leader, a crowned ruler of a nation, with or without wide public support. And he has been crowned with specific national expectations which he, himself, undoubtedly shares personally. He is sent forth at the head of a national army to conquer. The man and the nation he represents, and out of which he so haughtily rides, seeks dominance over other rulers, other peoples, and other nations.

No doubt, an adoring and fondling crowd lines the avenues and waves its banners as he leaves the city in search of dominance. “Make our nation great again” we might hear them cheer. “Make us #1” they shout. “We’re #1, we’re #1, we’re #1.” Blood sport is such a blast.

The notice that the rider intends to conquer; that dominance is the driving force in his life, is central to understanding the meaning of the white horse and its rider. It is central to understanding the following horses with their riders. It is central to understanding everything that follows in the Book of Revelation. Whatever happens from here on out in the Book, the Revelator wants us to understand that it all began with an unholy desire—a desire to conquer, to dominate. It is all downhill from here. Every evil has this desire for domination—emotional domination, physical domination, sexual domination, military domination, national domination, economic domination—as its genesis. Every evil begins in the human heart and works its way out into human conduct.

This insight is not, of course, original with John. He learned it from Jesus, who, during his earthly ministry, expressed wonder at the fact that even his closest disciples were “without understanding also” when it came to the origination of human sin and defilement.

“And he said, ‘That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.’”⁷

Jesus’ warning about the impurity of the human heart and the consequences that flow from

⁷ Mark 7.²⁰⁻²³

that impurity, so well depicted in the person riding the white horse, was delivered to that first of all men, Adam, thousands of years earlier.

“And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, *sin conceiveth in their hearts...*”⁸

The Book of Mormon editor comments upon the very sort of desires, behaviors, and consequences in his Nephite culture that are reflected in the desires, behaviors, and consequences of the rider on the white horse,

“Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this—Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world. And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity...”⁹

I am more than just a little intrigued by the advice/warning that the Lord offered W. W. Phelps—author of that most famous of LDS hymns, “The Spirit of God”—in the summer of 1831.

“He hath need to repent, for I, the Lord, am not well pleased with him, *for he seeketh to excel*, and he is not sufficiently meek before me.”¹⁰

The human heart, ever insecure when God is absent, is a deep well of desire for power, authority, prestige, riches, and domination. This human desire to “excel,” to conquer, to dominate displeases God. It requires repentance. The consequences of not resisting, of refusing to repent of these unholy desires lead almost inevitably to conflict and destruction. Left unchecked, such desires have brought and will bring the sorrows of societal collapse and annihilation, as John will illustrate so effectively with his next three horsemen and his

⁸ Moses 6.⁵⁵; emphasis added

⁹ 3 Nephi 5.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

¹⁰ DC 58.⁴¹

apocalypse as a whole.

So, John's apocalyptic vision begins with the discernment of a perverted human desire: the desire to dominate, excel, and conquer. But this unholy lust possessed by the rider on the white horse, along with the nation he represented, will do more than "defile the man" himself. It will defile the entire planet. The following three horses and their riders, along with the scenes of the fifth seal, will depict the defilement, the violence, the despoliation, the bloodshed, and the incalculable death perpetrated by the rider of the white horse with his unholy desires until, finally, in the sixth seal, God takes it in hand to begin the process of checking and cleansing such desire in hopes of bring about the victory of godliness over ungodliness: divine desire over satanic desire.

Scenes repeated countless times

Before turning to the three remaining horses, we should emphasis, again, that what the Revelator sees in the four horsemen should not, in my view, be thought of as one-off events. They are not "scenes" only from "the first thousand years," "the second thousand years," etc. of earth's "temporal existence." The rider of the white horse is not Enoch, or any other pre-diluvian figure. He is certainly not Jesus Christ, a common interpretation of traditional Christians.¹¹ Rather, the unholy desire to dominate found in the rider of the first seal, along with its devastating and deadly consequences in the following seals, have played themselves out at the national level countless times in every age over the course of human history.

Today, we have no limit to the number of individuals who capture their national institutions and structures and use them to fulfill their personal desire to cruelly conquer and dominate. Such individuals tend to be charismatic, cunning, and flattering. They are, often, sociopaths; men such as Syria's Bashar al-Assad, North Korea's Kim Jong-un, Russia's Vladimir Putin, or America's Donald J. Trump, to name but a few. More often, however, they are common men and women who partake of a twisted nationalistic consciousness and so are deceived by

¹¹ Indeed, interpretations that have the rider of the white horse as Jesus is a reflection of the very satanic mentality that John is describing and condemning. It is a convenient way of justifying the national violence in which Christians have so often and so willing participated.

the age-old traditions of dominance. But, whether sociopathic or “normal,” they most certainly follow a satanic impulse to dominate. And their desires lead to the sort of carnage and death represented by the remaining horsemen of the apocalypse.

But an overweening desire to dominate along with its consequent carnage are not limited to such madmen making use of national institutions and structures. This desire to excel has played itself out millions upon millions of times at a smaller scale on the smaller stage of unholy individual desire and its attendant harms. Even as I write this, it is being played out at the public and private level in countless lives. Even without national institutions and military forces to enhance the effectiveness and magnitude of their cruelty, common, everyday citizens like you and I can be caught up in the desire for dominance. And we, with our own berserk desires to excel and dominate can and do inflict terrible harms upon others. Tragically, notwithstanding the Revelator’s inspired warning, these unholy desires for dominance and the carnage they produce will undoubtedly play themselves out at the national and individual level many more times in the future, bringing pain and suffering to many more millions of God’s children.

Illustration

We have maintained that rather than representing singular individuals or events from specific eras, the four horsemen represent types, patterns of thought and behavior that have repeated themselves over and over in human history. If this is true, we should have no difficulty identifying examples of these attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, our greatest difficulty will come in limiting ourselves to but one or two. We will limit ourselves to two examples from the Book of Mormon. The two individuals and the events surrounding their national influence are separated, according to the Book of Mormon chronicler, by only a dozen years or so, demonstrating just how common is the phenomenon that John uses the four horsemen to illustrate.

It is in the fifth year of the reign of the judges that the chronicler introduces us to one, Amlici. He is described as “a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the

world,” who “by his cunning, [had] drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people.”¹² After failing to achieve his desire for dominance through legal means, he, like a certain “American” loser in 2020, resorted to extra-legal coup-like strategies to achieve his desire for kingship and dominance.

“Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor. *They gathered themselves together, and did consecrate Amlici to be their king. Now when Amlici was made king over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him.”¹³

In Amlici, we have a man like the rider on the white horse. Amlici intended, by hook or crook, to possess the dominance that comes with kingship. Having achieved his goal in part, he sought to increase his dominance through violent warfare. As we will see in the following homilies, the evils brought by the four horsemen of the apocalypse will occur in Nephite society as a direct result of Amlici’s ungodly desire to conquer, excel, and dominate.

According to the Book of Mormon chronicler, it was some fourteen years later that another, like-minded man arose on the Nephite political stage. His name was Amalickiah. If the chronicler chose not to specifically point out Amlici’s inordinate desire for dominance, preferring, rather, to demonstrate this obvious desire by his overt actions, the second occurrence, coming, as it did, so quickly on the heels of the first, convinced the chronicler, it seems, to be clearer and more aggressive in his diagnosis of the causes for violent warfare among his people. He would, then, mention Amalickiah’s desire and “designs” (which we read as coexistent with “desire”) over and over.

The 19th year of Nephite rule by judgeship was an extraordinarily eventful year.¹⁴ It is during this year that we first hear of Amalickiah, “a large and strong man”¹⁵ who had presumably been active in politics for some time and would eventually have a powerfully negative impact

¹² Alma 2.¹⁻²

¹³ Alma 2.⁸⁻¹⁰

¹⁴ The events of this year are recorded in Alma 45.^{2-49.3}.

¹⁵ Alma 46.³

on both Nephite and Lamanite history for many years to come. This politician was “a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words.” Because of his cunning and flattery, he managed to lead “away the hearts of many people to do wickedly.”¹⁶ His victims included “many in the church.”¹⁷ The object of his cunning and the nature of the wickedness that he incited in his followers was the overthrow of Nephite “elected judgeship” and its replacement with an authoritarian monarchy.

The text emphasizes Amalickiah’s desiring, craving, and designing nature—a nature that seemed to infect, like a plague, everyone who gave heed to him. We are told, first, that “Amalickiah was *desirous* to be a king.” He gathered around him men, “lower judges,” who mimicked Amalickiah in “*seeking* for power.”¹⁸ Realizing that he and his like-minded followers, benumbed with desire, were outnumbered, Amalickiah escaped Zarahemla with a few of his closest allies and sought asylum among the Lamanites.

Here, as part of “the plan in his heart to dethrone the king of the Lamanites,” Amalickiah shifted the target of his desire from kingship over Nephites to second in command over the Lamanite military forces.¹⁹ Having achieved this desired position of power through flattery, Amalickiah next conspired to encourage mutiny against the Lamanite general, Lehonti. This was consistent, the chronicler informs us, with “the thing that Amalickiah *desired*, that he might accomplish his *designs* in dethroning the king.”²⁰ After assassinating Lehonti, Amalickiah set his sights directly upon the Lamanite throne. This desire was accomplished through assassination of the reigning Lamanite king. Thus “by fraud and deceit,”²¹ he “gained the hearts of the people”²² and “obtained the kingdom; yea, he was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites.”²³

But still the man’s appetite for dominance was not satisfied.

¹⁶ Alma 46.¹⁰

¹⁷ Alma 46.⁷

¹⁸ Alma 46.⁴

¹⁹ Alma 47.⁴

²⁰ Alma 47.¹⁶

²¹ Alma 48.⁷

²² Alma 47.³⁰

²³ Alma 47.³⁵

“As soon as Amalickiah had obtained the kingdom he began to inspire the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi; yea, he did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites. And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites, insomuch that in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges, he having accomplished *his designs* thus far, yea, having been made king over the Lamanites, *he sought also to reign over all the land, yea, and all the people who were in the land, the Nephites as well as the Lamanites.* Therefore, *he had accomplished his design*, for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger, insomuch that he had gathered together a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites. For *he was determined*, because of the greatness of the number of his people, to overpower the Nephites and to bring them into bondage.”²⁴

After a failed first military invasion of Zarahemla, Amalickiah “was exceedingly angry with his people, because he had not obtained *his desire* over the Nephites; he had not subjected them to the yoke of bondage.”²⁵ For five long years afterwards, Amalickiah stewed in his juiced-up desires, awaiting another chance to fulfil his desires for dominance over the Nephite nation. Finally, with the outbreak of civil war among the Nephites, Amalickiah saw his chance.

It is without irony and pursuant to his message that the Book of Mormon chronicler reports that the civil war was the result of Nephites who

“Were *desirous* that the law should be altered in a manner to overthrow the free government and to establish a king over the land...Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and *they sought* to be kings; and they were supported by those who *sought* power and authority over the people.”²⁶

See how desire for domination grows, infects, and spirals out of control—just as we will see in the four horsemen of the apocalypse!

²⁴ Alma 48.¹⁻⁴, emphasis added

²⁵ Alma 49.²⁶, emphasis added

²⁶ Alma 51.^{5, 8}, emphasis added

Finally, some six years after Amalickiah had first yielded to the impulses of the unholy desire for dominance, his personal madness came to an end at the tip of an assassin's javelin; but not before he had infected his brother, Ammaron, who carried on Amalickiah's mad desire for dominance and extended the years-long war between the Nephite and Lamanite nations. And not before one inspired writer could record his divine insight into the wickedness and pain that one man's desire to conquer and dominate can bring.

“Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one. Yea, and *we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men.*”²⁷

The Revelator would agree wholeheartedly with the inspired Book of Mormon chronicler. This is, in fact, the very point the Revelator will make by means of his four horsemen of the apocalypse.

We will return to Amlici and Amalickiah as illustrations of John's other three horsemen and the consequences of the desire to dominate. For now, we wish simply to call the reader's attention to the men's desire for dominance, the mimetic desire for dominance that they stirred in others, and the likeness they bear to Revelation's rider on the white horse.

Before concluding this illustration, we should make one final point concerning Amlici and Amalickiah. The reader may discern a similarity in their names. Both contain the three consonants *'mlc(k)*. In Hebrew, these three consonants are related to kingship.²⁸ Now, we know next to nothing about Nephite/Lamanite spoken or written language. We know nothing of so-called “reformed Egyptian. We know little of Nephite onomastic rules—how names are formed. That said, the two men seem to have names related to kingship. Amlici might mean something like “I shall be king.” Amalickiah's name, a theophoric name (a name including the name of a god), might mean something like “I will be Yahweh's king,” or “Yahweh will

²⁷ Alma 46.⁸⁻⁹, emphasis added

²⁸ *mālak*, “to be king, to rule,” *melek*, “king,” *melûkâ*, “kingship,” *malkût*, “kingly power,” *mamlākâ*, “kingdom.”

make me king.”

Whatever the exact meaning of the two names, they are almost certainly names that the two men adopted in the course of their lives rather than names which were given them at birth. Most importantly, both names reflect the two men’s single-minded desire, intent, and design to rule and dominate. Thus, even without the Book of Mormon narratives, their names would have informed us concerning the character of the two men and the desires and designs that drove them throughout their lifetimes.

Conclusion

After five chapters of preparatory material, John the Revelator finally turns his attention directly to his anticipated apocalypse. He begins his apocalypse with his famous four horsemen. The first of these four horsemen rides a white horse, symbolic of his wealth and power and prestige. This calvary man rides with a military bow, symbolizing his military prowess. This man of action is proclaimed ruler and given a crown. He rides out from his own nation with the intention of conquering other nations. The crowned leader’s personal desire for dominance is almost certainly a reflection of his nation’s desire. Leader and nation are driven to dominate. This unholy desire to conquer and dominate initiates all the carnage that follows with the remaining three horsemen and, indeed, in much of the remaining apocalypse. There would be no carnage and no apocalypse without this white horse, its rider, and this inordinate and unholy desire to excel, conquer, and dominate.

This rider, military man, and national leader, along with the nation he represents on the field of battle, does not represent any single individual, nation, or time frame. Rather, he represents a pattern or type that has repeated itself countless times in human history. He represents a human desire to dominate that is as old as this aged planet with its weapons of stone and stick and as modern as today’s world with its demonic inventions of nuclear weapons, man-less drones, and a myriad of other devilishly ingenious weapons of mass destruction.

But this desire to excel, conquer, and dominate has an even longer history than that of human history. Though the Revelator will not take up the subject in his portrayal of the four horsemen, he will take it up and make it explicit later in his work: this desire to dominate is older than the world itself. It has a history in heaven, long before the foundation of this world. It is the same desire and design that Satan possessed as he attempted to unseat God from his eternal throne. This unholy desire to excel, to conquer, to dominate is satanic. It brings with it the same consequences on earth that it brought in heaven—the fraying of society and the devastation of war.

In conformity with John’s call to action, we acknowledge and bear witness to the demonic presence of this first rider in our day, in our world, in our nation. The reality of these unholy desires to dominate, and the disruption to peace that they bring influence and find their way into our prayers. Here, in prayer, we acknowledge and pray against their demonic influences in our lives and the lives of those we love. We ask that God help us as we resist these influences, and ask that he engage himself against them here on earth, today, as he did in heaven so long ago.

“O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?
shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?
Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand?
pluck it out of thy bosom.
For God is my King of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.”²⁹

“Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies:
thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee.
Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven
in the time of thine anger:
the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath,
and the fire shall devour them.

²⁹ Psalm 74.¹⁰⁻¹²

Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth,
and their seed from among the children of men.

For they intended evil against thee:

they imagined a mischievous device,
which they are not able to perform.

Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back,
when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings
against the face of them.

Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength:
so will we sing and praise thy power.”³⁰

Even so, come, Lord, Jesus.

³⁰ Psalm 21.⁸⁻¹³

the four horsemen of the apocalypse—part 3 of 5

the red horse and its rider

Revelation 6.¹⁻⁸

Introduction

In our two preceding homilies devoted to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, we have suggested that John's purpose in writing the apocalypse was at least three-fold: 1) describe the world as it is, a world ruled by satanic impulses and powers; 2) imagine a better world, a world ruled by God and principles of godliness; and 3) call his readers to action such that they resist the former and hope, pray and labor for the latter.

As for the four horsemen, we have suggested that they represent the world as it is. Rather than representing singular individuals or eras, they represent types or patterns that have been and continue to be repeated over and over again. While this pattern plays itself out in the world as it is, it has its genesis in the heavens, as John will demonstrate later in his work. We have also suggested that the four horsemen represent one, single plot line. Each horse and its rider advance the established plot line of the preceding horse and rider.

The plot line begins with the first horse, white, with its rider. Based on his white mount, we identified the rider as a wealthy, prestigious, and powerful man.¹ With his military bow in hand, we were also able to identify him as a military man and likely calvary man. Finally, with his crown, we were able to identify him as a national leader. Imbibing the nation's character, this national leader marshaled his nation's forces with one objective in mind: to conquer and dominate other peoples and nations.

¹ National leaders have, of course, until recently been male. So, we do not mean to be sexist here. Females now function as national leaders in many nations of the world. This is to be celebrated. One can hope that they will be wiser than their preceding male counterparts, but so far, anyway, the jury is still out. If they continue the pattern established by their male forebearers, they will be no better than, and be under the same condemnation as those male leaders of the past.

We need not, indeed must not resort to any tired literalism or limit ourselves to any specific historical context when contemplating the individual or symbols found in the first seal: white horse, rider, bow, and crown. If we were, today, to update the scene, we might legitimately replace the white horse with a black stretch limousine or sleek white private jet (these are military leaders' modern modes of transportation, the ugly green camouflaged jeep long ago jettisoned for something more respectable, corporate). We could replace the military bow with fighter jets, aircraft carriers, unmanned drones, and, of course, the granddaddy of them all, nuclear weapons. And we might replace the crown with a Bible on which presidents and prime ministers swear oaths even as they plan how to break them (But no matter their ideologically viewpoint, they can always be counted on to remain true to the satanic principle of buying up armies and navies in order to wage eternal war and reign with blood and horror on the earth).

This horse and rider represent the time-honored desire to conquer and dominate; a cancerous desire that nearly every nation in world history has imbibed and violently acted upon. With the desire to dominate as the first act in our ongoing plot line, we only wait to see the consequences of this unholy desire. The Revelator does not keep us waiting; for the opening of the second seal with its red horse and its rider advances the plot line to its next logical phase. Predictably, this next phase involves consequences of this desire that are tragic, deadly, and hellish.

The first horseman reminds us that all the tragedy, all the death, and all the hellishness found in the coming three seals—and, indeed, throughout much of the Book—begins with something as seemingly benign as a desire, a want, a craving, an unholy need: the desire, want, and need to excel, to conquer, to dominate. Without this satanic-like desire to dominate, not only would there be no four horsemen of the apocalypse, but there would be no apocalypse. But this unholy desire does exist, ever and always. So too do the consequences, represented in the second, third, and fourth horsemen. It is to the second of the four horses and its rider that we now turn our attention.

With the appearance of the white horse in the first seal, we considered the meaning of its color, and concluded that it was indicative of wealth, power, and prestige. So, what are we to make of our second horse, red in color? Perhaps the red color of our second horse tells us nothing. Perhaps the horse is just a horse, a simple brown/chestnut horse. But we are dealing with THE REVELATOR here. This is his APOCALYPSE. Of course his notice that the horse is red is indicative of something more, much more, than equestrian hair color. But what might the red color of the second horse signify? While the reader ponders this mystery, we should take a moment to consider the red horse's rider.

The rider is equipped with a deadly, vicious sword. With his vicious sword in hand, the rider is given an awesome commission: to "take peace from the earth." This results in rampant, militant, institutional mayhem and murder: peace was taken from the earth "to the extent that they kill each other."

So, with our mounted rider slashing this way and that with his vicious sword, corpses lying about the horse's pounding hooves, why, would you guess, is John's second horse red? It is difficult to imagine the reason to be anything other than sinister. It is difficult to see the horse's red color being the result of anything other than the fact that it is covered with freshly drawn human blood. Indeed, it is tempting to see the same white horse that appeared in the first seal, now splattered red from spouting human blood.

The present homilist might be accused of having an overactive imagination. However, he can hardly be accused of being more imaginative than the Revelator.

But whatever one decides about this imagery of the red horse, there is no doubt where the first rider's desire to conquer and dominate has led. Predictably, it has led to unimaginable conflict and violent death—just how unimaginable we will not fully grasp until the fourth horse. Of course, this conflict and violent death is not surprising. What else could we possibly expect? What, you expected nations and peoples under attack to submit to their enemy's aggression? Bow down to the invading army? Thank the conquering "hero"? Of

course, they offer resistance. Of course, the resistance to violence and tyranny leads to death and destruction.

No insatiable nation or its enabling leaders can ever claim that resistance came as a shock; that the ensuing war simply snuck up on them. Unholy desire for dominance always telegraphs conflict and carnage long before they appear in all their gory glory. And to be sure, after the Revelator's apocalyptic warning, no nation or national leader can ever claim surprise at the consequence of their unholy desire to dominate and subjugate. They are, in fact, left without excuse. These warmongers, having been warned and forewarned, will surely need assertions of God's merciful disposition to be true as much as any whoremonger or the vilest of sinner.

So, our red horse and rider, representing war and violent death, is the direct and predictable consequence of our white horse and its rider with his desire to conquer, subjugate, and dominate. The second horse and rider are the continuation of the plot line began in the first seal.

The agent in the passive voice

Now, we should say a word or two about the passive voice that we have seen in these first two seals and will see again in the fourth. In the first seal, the rider of the white horse "*was granted* a crown." In the second seal, the rider of the red horse is "*given power* to take peace from the earth" and thus instigate the "killing of each other." In the fourth seal, the rider of the pale horse "*was given dominion.*" Even in the third seal, where there is no passive voice, the horseman, this time on a black horse, is not in complete control as he seems to be commanded to limit his military induced economic devastation: "olive oil and wine you are not to impact."

Many commentators, perhaps most, understand this passive voice and the fact that the various riders seem not to be in total control of their lives or activities as indicative of God's sovereignty, even in the lives and actions of ungodly individuals and in the wake of their

tragic choices. Such individuals as those represented by the four horsemen could and would not become rulers, wage war, impact the lives of others, or dominate in any way, it is argued, unless God granted them such powers. According to this interpretation, then, it was God who granted the first rider a crown, gave power to the second rider to “take peace from the earth,” restricted the third rider’s impact, and gave unfettered dominion to the fourth rider.

Hmmm...

I know it is popular to speak of God as a God who works through human history— “God of history,” But I am not so sure that this understanding of God is appropriate to the passive voice found in this text. For a number of reasons which we cannot go into here, I am not wild about this common interpretation of the passive voice as found here. And, not unlike many, I am not so sure of God’s ability, or perhaps better, willingness to control human desires and activities, either at the micro or macro level. Human beings, both as individuals and as group members have a divinely appointed agency. What they are “given” is the right and responsibility to be agents unto themselves. God does not encroach upon this divinely appointed agency. But he does hold human beings accountable for the way they exercise this divinely bestowed right.

While I have no better answers than anyone else about questions of theodicy, or how God’s participation in human affairs maintains agency, I feel little uncertainty about this: notwithstanding the occasional rhetorical flourish, God does not “give” leave or power to individuals to dominate, oppress, terrorize, maim, kill, or otherwise bring hell into the lives of others as our four horsemen do.

So, what are we to make of the passive voice? What message does it send? Powerful rulers—historically, and even today, mostly male—even the most powerful among them, do not rule without consent; without it being “given” them by their fellow citizens. The circle of consent may be extraordinarily small as it always was in the ancient and medieval worlds. It may be more expansive as it is in so many modern nations. But the power to rule is not in any single individual’s power to control.

In ancient Egypt, for example, the power to rule was “given” a Pharaoh by a mythology of succession adopted and perpetuated by Egyptian power elites. Without this consenting mythology and its practitioners, no individual could be called, “Pharaoh.” In empires such as Assyria or Babylon or Rome, small circles of autocrats “gave” or sustained a man’s power to rule through consent. Medieval monarchs ruled through consent of small, normally plutocratic, circles of patronage. Today’s presidents, prime ministers, senators, governors, mayors, etc., govern and rule through consent of electorates—at least in theory. Such rulers may be, often have been brutal and intimidating bullies—one might think, for example, of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein or tRUMP, America’s modern-day version of Caligula. Nevertheless, they still require an, often, obsequious circle of consent, however small. Today, just how little control modern leaders have is often seen by the fear they have for the fickle and demanding electorate, whose whims leaders seek to mimic in order to maintain their hold on whatever power they may possess.² It’s pathetic, really. Juvenile. But no less evil and no less deadly for that.

The Revelator is completely cognizant of the fact that no single individual can control his own power to rule. Thus, the rider on the white horse is “granted” power to rule, not by God, but by a circle of consent, big or small. Consistent with his desire to dominate, a circle of consent gives him leave to follow his heart’s desire. Disturbing whatever peace there may have been, that same circle of consent commissions him to engage in war, whatever its cost in human life. Thus, it gives him power, authorizes him to kill. Unfortunate for the circle of consent, it cannot control the level of death and hell it unleashes with its commission. Things can and often do get out of hand, escalating and spiraling out of control, as we will see in the fourth seal. “War,” as the saying goes, “has its own logic.”

illustration

As an illustration of the desire to conquer, rule, and dominate that is found in the rider of the first seal’s white horse, we examined two Book of Mormon figures, Amlici and Amalickiah,

² There seems to me to be no other explanation, for example, for America’s GOP to have so slavishly, cowardly, and self-destructively followed tRUMP except that its members feared that portion of the electorate that were mesmerized by the man’s horror show of unreality, lies, and corruption.

along with those in their circle of consent. We observed the same unholy desire in each of them. Although the Book of Mormon chronicler simply reported Amlici's machinations and let his desire to dominate speak for itself, that same chronicler choose to be more pointed about Amalickiah's desires, specifically highlighting his and his followers' desires and "designs" to conquer, subjugate, and dominate.

"Amalickiah was desirous to be a king."³

"Yea, having been made king over the Lamanites, he sought also to reign over all the land."⁴

"Those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people."⁵

Captain Moroni, inspired by the same spirit as John, didn't need John to tell him what to expect as a consequence of Amalickiah's unholy desire. Moroni, we are informed, "knew that [Amalickiah] would stir up the Lamanites to anger against them and cause them to come to battle against them; and this he knew that Amalickiah would do that he might obtain his purposes [i.e., fulfill his desires]."⁶

Moroni didn't even need to rely on any inspired intuition. Amalickiah's brother, Ammaron, made clear how far his desire to conquer and dominate would lead him and his people.

"We will wage a war which shall be eternal, either to the subjecting the Nephites to our authority or to their eternal extinction."⁷

Indeed, the disruption of peace, the battles, and the violent end of so many lives that flowed from Amalickiah's desire to dominate "never did cease for the space of many years"⁸—just

³ Alma 46.⁴

⁴ Alma 48.²

⁵ Alma 51.⁸

⁶ Alma 46.³⁰

⁷ Alma 54.²⁰

⁸ Alma 48.²²

short of twenty, according to the chronicler.⁹

Just over a dozen years before Amalickiah's rise, Amlici desired to be king over the Nephites. When he failed to accomplish this desire through legal means, he ordered his followers to "take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him."¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Amlici's intended victims resisted.

"They did prepare to meet them; yea, they did arm themselves with swords, and with cimeters, and with bows, and with arrows, and with stones, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons of war, of every kind."¹¹

The ensuing battle brought great death.

"There were slain of the Amlicites twelve thousand five hundred thirty and two souls; and there were slain of the Nephites six thousand five hundred sixty and two souls."¹²

Just as our rider on the red horse, Amlici's and Amalickiah's shifting circles of consent gave them power to "take peace from" Nephite and Lamanite lands even to and including the violent snuffing out of many lives—all of this to satisfy two power-hungry men's unholy desire to dominate.

Conclusion

In parts 2 and 3 of this series of homilies on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, we have viewed the first two acts of John's four act play. In the first act, John exposes the unhallowed and obsessive human desire to conquer, to dominate. In the second act, John reveals the natural and recurring consequences of this unholy desire: war and violent death. Through the two Book of Mormon characters, Amlici and Amalickiah, we have illustrated these first two

⁹ These wars are reported in Alma 46-62

¹⁰ Alma 2.¹⁰

¹¹ Alma 2.¹²

¹² Alma 2.¹⁹

stages of the pattern of human desire and behavior that John, the Revelator, will describe through all four of his demonic horsemen.

In seeking to understand his father's vision of the "Tree of Life"—in particular, the meaning of the tree itself—Nephi sought inspiration. In response to his plea for understanding, Nephi was granted a series of fourteen visions.¹³ After some preparatory explanation in the first three visions, Nephi finally learns the meaning of the tree in his fourth vision. Here, he learns that the incredible tree seen by his father is a representation of "the love of God" which "is the most desirable above all things."¹⁴ This vision of the love of God is followed by four more visions, each of which reveals how God's love was manifest through Jesus Christ's life, ministry, suffering, and death.

With his ninth vision, however, the series of visions takes an ominous turn. In his ninth vision, Nephi learns that, notwithstanding the tree's attractiveness, there is a second opposing force that vies for human attention and affection. This is symbolically represented by the infamous "large and spacious building." This building, it turns out, represents "the world and the wisdom thereof" and "the pride of the world."¹⁵ One can be attracted to and love God or be attracted to and love the world. With this ominous turn of the ninth vision, the remaining visions seem to portray the tug and pull that humanity feels between the two opposing affections.

In his tenth vision, Nephi

"Beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea. And* I beheld multitudes gathered together to battle, one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people. And* I beheld many generations pass away, after the manner of wars and contentions in the land; and I beheld many cities, yea, even that I did not number them."¹⁶

¹³ The 14 visions, of varying lengths, are: 11.¹⁻⁷; 11.⁸⁻¹¹; 11.¹²⁻¹⁸; 11.¹⁹⁻²³; 11.²⁴⁻²⁵; 11.²⁶⁻²⁹; 11.³⁰; 11.³¹; 11.³²⁻³⁶; 12.¹⁻¹⁰; 12.¹¹⁻²³; 13.¹⁻¹⁴.⁸; 14.⁹⁻¹⁷; 14.¹⁸⁻³⁰

¹⁴ See 1 Nephi 11.²²

¹⁵ 1 Nephi 11.³⁵⁻³⁶

¹⁶ 1 Nephi 12.¹⁻³

Similarly, in his eleventh vision, Nephi “saw wars and rumors of wars among them; and in wars and rumors of wars I saw many generations pass away.”¹⁷ After warring amongst themselves for so long, his people would then be faced with a “gentile” population committed to dominance. Notwithstanding the manifestations of God’s love shown to these “gentiles,” the desire for dominance would lead to “wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth.”¹⁸

“Wars and rumors of wars.” This phrase represents a principal character of this world, with its “wisdom” and “pride.” “Wars and rumors of wars” represent one of the most common enterprises of the human race.

John would certainly applaud and second Nephi’s insight. It is the message he is sending through his four horsemen.

As if the repeated warning of “wars and rumors of wars” became stuck in his head, within a year of finishing his translation work, the Book of Mormon’s modern-day translator, Joseph Smith, would repeat the warning for his own and following generations.

“And in that day shall be heard of wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men's hearts shall fail them.”¹⁹

Only a year later, this same Joseph would warn of the expanding nature of warfare that would face the world after him. “Beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina... war will be poured out upon all nations.”²⁰ In the end, this self-induced downpour of violence would continue “until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations.” But we must hold off any discussion concerning such “consumption” for the fourth horse and rider.

For now, we simply reaffirm scripture’s testimony—John’s, Nephi’s, and Joseph’s to name

¹⁷ 1 Nephi 12.²¹

¹⁸ 1 Nephi 14.¹⁵

¹⁹ DC 45.²⁶

²⁰ See DC 87.¹⁻²

but three—concerning humanity’s insane and habitual interests in dominating, warring, and killing. Very few human “endeavors” are more pervasive than that to war and kill one another. “Wars and rumors of war” is as good a description of humanity’s character as any.

Before we end this homily, we must, as always, remind the reader that John the Revelator was involved in much more than descriptive analysis of the ugly human past and its bleak future.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”²¹

John’s work was ministerial, his apocalypse a call to action. A call to repent. A call to reject and resist the wisdom and pride of the world. A call to reject and resist the unholy desire to dominate others. Finally, a call to “renounce war and proclaim peace.”

“Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me. Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace...”²²

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ Revelation 1.³

²² DC 98.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

the four horsemen of the apocalypse—part 4 of 5

the black horse and its rider

Revelation 6.¹⁻⁸

Introduction

John the revelator wrote his apocalypse with an eye to describing the world as it has always been and contrasting that with the world as it might be. In doing so, he sought to be more than descriptive. He acted in his role as pastor to a people. As a faithful pastor, John issued a call to action in his great work.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”¹

John begins his apocalyptic vision with his famous four horsemen. Through them, disciples of Christ can perceive the world as it is and thus fully appreciate the actions that are needed and the evils against which they war.

With the first of his four horsemen of the apocalypse, the Revelator names the first evil that disciples of Jesus must perceive, confront, and resist: the human desire to excel, to conquer, and to dominate others. This unholy desire, he warns through symbolism, inevitably leads to conflict. The Revelator knows what Jesus taught the Nephites so clearly.

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be

¹ Revelation 1.³

done away.”²

Although the revelator is focused on the world stage, the disciple must first resist this unholy urge in him or herself. He or she is then adequately equipped to name, confront, and resist this desire as it manifests itself in the society and nation in which he or she resides.

With the second horse and its rider, John unmask the human desire to conquer and excel and dominate as the springboard for all war, with all its attendant evils, including the most ungodly of them all, violent death. This unmasking is accomplished through the symbolism of the rider’s “vicious sword” and the horse’s red color, almost certainly a reflection of its being freshly splattered with human blood.

The desires and actions found in these first two seals do not represent desires and actions by any single individual or nation in any given era, but a pattern of human desire and conduct that has been repeated over and over in human history, is being played out in today’s world, and will, sadly, likely play itself out many times in the future. Because of the incessant and unholy desire to dominate, war and rumor of war dominate the global landscape: past, present, and future.

But violent death in battle is only one way that war brings death. Human warfare is far more imaginative. So, the Revelator introduces us to another horse, this one black, and its rider to further our understanding of the consequences of the unholy desire to dominate, and to increase, however unwelcome, our perception of the evil “genius” of warfare.

the black horse

With the coming of the black horse, we see the weakness of interpretations that seek to connect its rider with specific individuals or eras—as in the common LDS interpretation that the rider is Moses, giver of “the Law,” holding the scales of justice. The scales are so

² 3 Nephi 11.^{29–30}. This saying takes in a far broader concern than the relatively trivial conflicts over dogma that take place in an Elder’s quorum meeting.

obviously commercial that one wonders how such an interpretation ever gained traction. Of course, the use of commercial scales is regulated by law, and so the improper use of this commercial instrument constitutes injustice.

Be that as it may, we have a black horse whose rider holds weight scales in his hand. Small portions of wheat—the superior bread-making grain—and barley—the nutritionally inferior grain for a poorer man’s bread—are weighed and measured to be sold at exorbitantly inflated prices; prices that make survival most uncertain. At the same time, olive oil and wine continue to sell at their normal prices. What are we to make of all this? Following are a series of questions and answers that, we hope, will offer one rational and feasible interpretation of the third seal with its horse and rider.

Question: Why is the wheat and barley so expensive?

Answer: According to the economic doctrine of supply and demand, common, abundant things are cheap. Uncommon and rare things are more costly. I suggest that a scarcity of the two grains explains their exorbitant cost.

Question: Why are wheat and barley scarce?

Answer: If we follow the logic of the horsemen, these two grains are scarce because of warfare. This phenomenon is so common and so pervasive in human history as to require little explanation or proof. We have many examples, from the ancient world to the modern, when food was scarce due to war. In fact, it is entirely likely that many, if not most of the food shortages and famines that have occurred in human history were a consequence of the stupid human tendency to engage in war rather than any natural, climactic phenomenon or divinely instigated “plague” to which so many so often appeal.

It only makes sense. Troops trample crops and kill the livestock of the nation whose borders they invade. Those same troops pillage and plunder their enemy’s resources in order to supply their own force’s food needs. Food producers’ production of food is disrupted as they

go into hiding, are killed, or are conscripted into defensive military forces. Local and national financial institutions that in normal times help to enhance production are strapped for cash as resources are diverted for military purposes. Need we go on?

Question: Why are olive orchards and wineries unaffected?

Answer: Again, this is common. An invading army will not stay forever. As one of the reasons for a nation's violent incursions is inevitably economic, the nation will want to benefit economically from a defeated foe even after it has extracted its forces from foreign lands. Benefits will come in the form of tribute payments. Since grain is planted anew each year, a field of destroyed grain can be replaced in a single year, thus providing a quick benefit in tribute payments. But olive trees and grape vines are different. They are far more labor intensive. They require skilled upkeep year after year. If an invading army destroys these agricultural products, it will require many years to regrow orchards and wineries that can provide economic benefit to the dominant nation.

Thus, the Revelator is simply reporting what everyone already knows: during times of uncertainty, unrest, and war annual crops take the brunt of destruction and become scarcer than more labor-intensive crops and products. People suffer. People go hungry. People die of starvation.

This pattern of destruction weighs most heavily upon the poor. They can barely afford the necessities of life in normal times and at usual prices, let alone in desperate times and at the more exorbitant prices. Even in good times, the poor can afford little olive oil or wine. In times of inflation, these are luxuries the poor can hardly afford. The wealthy, on the other hand, go right on profiting and purchasing in good times and bad.³ Therefore, it is always the wealthy, the prestigious, the power elites of society who can afford to follow their unholy desires for dominance through war. They can economically afford war with its attendant

³ One need look no further than the COVID pandemic of 2020-2021, when the wealthy went right on getting wealthier while working people lost jobs and worried over having resources sufficient to keep a home over their heads, medical resources available, and food in their mouths.

privations.

Question: What is the significance of the horse's black color?

Answer: Whereas the previous horse's red might have represented the color of freshly drawn human blood, the black horse's color may reflect that of human blood, dried to black over the passage of time. Or, perhaps, the black horse represents the color of the burnt, blackened fields of crops. It might also represent the greyish color of human flesh that is suffering a slow death from malnutrition.

Take your pick. But we can say this with a high level of certainty: there are no explanations of the horse's black color that would make of it a good omen or positive aspect (Why would Moses ride a black, rather than white horse?).

Now, the "command" that the aggressor not destroy olive orchards and vineyards—and thus disrupt the economy of olives, olive oil, grapes, and wine—issues from "the four creatures" that dwell in the presence of God: "Olive oil and wine you are not to impact." Some conclude from this, as we discussed earlier, that the Revelator wishes to affirm that God's sovereignty still holds sway over the actions of those individuals and nations that would perpetrate violence. In this interpretation, then, it is God who is limiting the damage that the violent aggressor is allowed to do.

I am not convinced. There are certainly other equally reasonable interpretations of this "command." In my interpretation of the four horsemen, John is setting forth a common pattern of human behavior. Desire to conquer leads to war. War leads to death. War and death lead to economic disruptions. Economic disruptions lead to more death through privation.

But even the perpetrators of aggression, themselves, often place limits on their own destructiveness—not out of any concern for the victims of their aggression, but out of concern for future benefits that their "restraint" will bring to themselves. So, the four creatures, observing the familiar scenes play out before them, anticipate and announce the

human “command” to preserve olive orchards and vineyards. Their “command,” then, should be read as descriptive of human, rather than divine prescriptions.

Illustration

In our examination of the white and red horses with their riders, we utilized the Book of Mormon figures, Amlici and Amalickiah, to illustrate the phenomenon or pattern of human thought and behavior that John, the Revelator is portraying in the first two seals. Both men, like the rider on the white horse, were desirous of domination. They wished to dominate among their own people and then, as leaders of their people, dominate other peoples and nations. Both men repeatedly found circles of consent, small and large, that would grant them personal rule, and authorize them to pursue dominance of other peoples through violence.

Amlici’s and Amalickiah’s desires for personal and national dominance led, predictably, as it did with John’s red horse, to war and violent death. The Book of Mormon chronicler informs us that thousands of Nephite and Lamanite combatants died in battle.⁴ In addition, we are informed that many non-combatants died as a result of the battles that flowed from Amlici’s desire for dominance: “many women and children had been slain with the sword.”⁵ In the case of Amalickiah’s desire for dominance, the resulting wars lasted off and on for nearly twenty years.

In what seems like a near exact parallel to our interpretation of the third seal with its black horse and rider, the Book of Mormon chronicler informs us that “also many of their flocks and their herds; and also many of their fields of grain were destroyed, for they were trodden down by the hosts of men.” Thus “the people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds, and also for the loss of their fields of grain, which were trodden under foot and destroyed by the Lamanites.”⁶

All of this conforms to John’s pattern of human desire and behavior as previewed in his first

⁴ See, for example, Alma 2.¹⁹

⁵ Alma 3.²

⁶ Alma 3.² and 4.²

three horses with their riders. Desire for dominance led to war, war led to death, war and death led to severe economic disruption, food shortages, mass suffering, and the death of innocents.

Conclusion

John began his grand design of revealing this fallen world as it is by revealing the desire that underlies and fuels most if not all of its evils: desire. The desire to conquer. The desire to excel. The desire to dominate. These desires imitate those of the first great desirer, Satan, and are thus Satanic. Just as this desire to dominate led to war in heaven, it leads to war on earth. It leads to violent loss of life among warriors fighting in battle. It leads to violent loss of life of the innocent through economic privation. While the wealthy and powerful who survive the violence of war can survive the violence of economic privation, much of the populace cannot. The most vulnerable most certainly often do not survive the privation, but die, often, imperceptibly slow deaths that the ruthless can contribute to other causes.

This is the story, the plot, the byline of the first three horsemen of John's apocalypse. The story has played itself out in human history, not one, not twice, not a hundred, but thousands upon thousands of times. There is no era of human history that has not known—and, all too often, as in ours, lionized and celebrated!—this tragic story line.

Today, we not only have the advantage of John's warning, but of those such as we have seen in the Book of Mormon, as it recounted the tragic consequences of the desire to dominate as found in Amlici and Amalackiah. But, still, we persist in the insanity of it all.

Unfortunately, John has not yet mined the depths of the insanity. He has yet one more horseman to bring upon the stage. It is not a horseman with which we are unfamiliar. He has already ridden into our lives. He is present today. His satanic labors are enough to drive us, as it did John's imagined audience, to our knees and ask,

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge

and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”⁷

In our desire to be true to John’s call to action, we must now take a clear-eyed view of this fourth rider, who, along with his three accomplices, drew such tragic complaint from the lips of the innocent. This will be the objective of our fifth and final homily on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

⁷ Revelation 6.¹⁰

The four horsemen of the apocalypse—part 5 of 5
the pale horse and its rider
Revelation 6.¹⁻⁸

Introduction

We have now examined three of John's Four horsemen of the Apocalypse with their plotline of continuing and escalating human violence. The violence begins as a seemingly unremarkable and inconsequential seedling: the seed of desire. A national leader, and the nation he leads desires to conquer and dominate other leaders and other nations. It looks so innocent and pure—like a pure, white horse. It seems so just. So inevitably right. The revelator's choice of a white horse is appropriate to the lie, so innocently and "righteously" propagated by this, the first of Revelation's many "anti-Christ" and their followers. The lie, however, will soon enough be exposed for what it is.

Taking root in the national soil, this seed becomes an expanding tree. Inevitably, the personal and national desire to conquer leads to a license to kill. War, bloodshed, and violent death flow from the mad desire. Deaths multiply. The lie of the white horse's purity is exposed. The horse turns from white to red as it becomes splattered with human blood. Not so innocent after all.

But the tree produces more than one kind of deadly fruit. Sadly, and contrary to the practiced and deceptive propaganda of the militarists, the death certificates that multiply as a result of war are not limited to the brave volunteers or the trained and skilled warriors who die on the glorious field of battle. In a world gone mad with wars and rumors of wars, there is no such thing as non-combatants. "Civilian" men, women, children, and even babes in arms—are drafted into the violence. They are drawn into "the war effort" as resources, particularly economic, are diverted, ruined, and destroyed in the ruthlessness of war. Economic devastation brings poverty with its accompanying hunger, starvation, and, finally, slow, tedious death. The black horse has arrived. The world turns black. Black with shattered hopes. Black with smoke. Black with burnt and smoldering crops. Black with starvation. But,

mostly, black with dried, crusty human blood on the muscular flanks of the rider's horse.

Would to God that it ended here. But it does not. There is another horse and another rider, this one building upon the mad, psychotic destructiveness of the former three. Like those who came before, this rider has ridden roughshod over the globe not once or twice or a hundred times, but thousands upon thousands of times. In every age and in every land its pestilence has been poured out upon earth's foolish and mostly complicit inhabitants—complicit, if only in their silent acceptance of the madness that poses as reason. We now turn to this fourth and final horse and rider.

Before doing so, just a reminder. John's vision of the four horsemen is not only descriptive of mad violence. It is a warning sign to those who would follow Jesus, King of Kings, who, even in his arrest, trial, sentencing, torture, and death refused repeated invitations and, likely, even more temptations, to take matters into his own hands and conquer through violent resistance. John's vision is a call to action. It calls the reader to follow and imitate their Master. It calls for discerning, sincere, active, and consistent non-violent resistance to the mad desires, actions, and forces that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse represent.

the pale horse

If the definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again but expecting a different result,” then, by definition, homo-sapiens is an insane race. Notwithstanding the warnings of history, each generation imagines that it is exempt from the natural and inevitable consequences of unholy desire for dominance and its attendant war, suffering, death, and hell. They can, they vainly imagine, keep it under control. But this is delusion. Once unleashed, the violence of desire cuts its own wide swath of human misery. Once set in motion, humankind is nearly powerless to stop it.

So, as the apocalyptic scene passes from third to fourth horseman, things have indeed spiraled out of control. Now rides forth a pale horse, a horse the color of a human corpse. Appropriate to the horse's color, the rider is named, ‘Death.’ The horse's color, however,

does not reflect the color of one corpse, but of many. With the rider of the red horse, we witnessed multitudes dead from the violence of battle. With the rider of the black horse, we witnessed multitudes dead from starvation and other economic privations. Sword and famine have already done their deadly work. Now, with the rider of the pale horse we witness multitudes of dead from... Death! What does this mean? What does the Revelator see?

Half a millennium before the Revelator, another visionary, Jeremiah, foresaw that a similar scenario would play itself out in the experiences of his own people. He saw that

“Such as are for death, to death;
And such as are for the sword, to the sword;
And such as are for the famine, to the famine;
And such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.”¹

Like the Revelator, Jeremiah mentions “death” as a means to “death” along with sword, famine, and captivity. Earlier, Jeremiah had warned Judah of Yahweh three instruments of death. The nation would be “consumed” “by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.”² So death by death might, among other things, mean death by pestilence or plague.

So, let me tell you what I see when I see people being killed by death.

I see the ground littered with rotting corpses; for there are so many dead that the living cannot gather and bury them all. Birds, rodents, dogs, and who knows what all else pick at the rotting corpses. Blood and gore and putrid juices ooze from the corpses, soak the ground, foul water sources, and breath disease into the air. Flies swarm and maggots sliver bringing the gifts of poisonous disease and death from the dead to the living. Again, Judah had many years earlier experienced such death.

“For thus saith the LORD concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born

¹ Jeremiah 15.²

² Jeremiah 14.¹²

in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land; ‘They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.’”³

At roughly the same time, a similar scene played itself out on the opposite side of the globe, as recorded by the Book of Mormon prophet, Ether.

“And so great and lasting had been the war, and so long had been the scene of bloodshed and carnage, that the whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead. And so swift and speedy was the war that there was none left to bury the dead, but they did march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood, leaving the bodies of both men, women, and children strewed upon the face of the land, to become a prey to the worms of the flesh. And the scent thereof went forth upon the face of the land, even upon all the face of the land; wherefore the people became troubled by day and by night, because of the scent thereof.”⁴

As horrific as this is, I see more. Death is a creative killer. There is another, even more common way that death brings death. Even today, we see it operating in many parts of the world. It has been going on, for example, between Israeli and Palestinian for generations. One death leads to two deaths. Two deaths lead to four. On and on it goes, bodies piling up as death’s survivors seek retribution. Vengeance. Pay back. Tit for tat. This is one of the reasons that it is so hard to turn off the tap of death once it has been turned on. Death’s multiply exponentially as grieving survivors seek to inflict an equal or greater portion of pain and death on the ones who inflicted them with pain and death.

This drive for retribution, to restore “honor” has a long and inglorious history. The inspired authors and editors of Genesis inform us of its existence early on in human history. They suggest through their storytelling that it would become a principal bringer of death among

³ Jeremiah 16.³⁻⁴

⁴ Ether 14.²¹⁻²³

our species. They allow a certain Lemek and the stern warning he delivered to his two trusted wives to make their point.

“‘ādâ and Şillâ, listen to what I have to say,
You wives of Lemek, give ear to my words.
‘Because I have killed a man for a trifle,
and a young man for merely striking me;
though an offense against Qayin might bring vengeance seven
times more severe than the offense,
one against Lemek is avenged seven times seventy.’”⁵

One need not imagine such a man’s reaction to a real offense, a death, for example, among those who were part of his circle.

There are of course, all sorts of other creative ways death can kill. One thinks of the sorrow of those left behind after a loved one has died a violent death, a sorrow that sometimes overwhelms the sufferer and brings them to the point of suicide. Yes, death is ingenious. Violent death, more creative and vicious yet.

To be sure, such hellish scenes are not pleasant to contemplate. Perhaps the reader has winced at some of the description found above. But we ignore the warning these horsemen of the apocalypse contain to our own detriment and destruction. And speaking of hell, Hell rides with Death. Many, many of those who die go to hell. Many, many of those who survive become hardened, living only to go to hell upon their eventual death. Again, the Book of Mormon describes these mechanisms.

“Now, they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea, and this was not all—they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God.”⁶

⁵⁵ Genesis 4.²³⁻²⁴, author’s translation

⁶ Alma 48.²³

“But behold, because of the exceedingly great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become hardened, because of the exceedingly great length of the war...”⁷

Yes, war is hell on earth. War’s most gifted practitioners, demons from the bottomless pit. Those who wage war on earth will, in death, return to that same bottomless pit from whence they drew their inspiration for war.

Now, we should say a word about the magnitude of the violence and death that is found in this fourth seal. It has led many to conclude that the scene playing out before the Revelator was extraordinary. They assume it hasn’t happened yet. They assume, therefore, that it is a scene that could only be played out in a uniquely wicked “latter-day” or “end-times” setting. Obviously, I have a different understanding of all four horsemen than many more orthodox readings. I do not argue that the scene found in the fourth seal cannot play itself out in end-times—indeed, why should the end-times be any different than the former times. But for several reasons, textual and otherwise, I believe the common assumption, the inclination to assign the fourth seal *only* to the latter-days to be in error. In fact, the error, it seems to me, makes the appearance of yet more horsemen like that of John’s fourth horsemen all the more certain.

The Revelator witnesses that Death and Hell hold sway over “a large swath of the planet.” This, according to our translation. The King James Version reads a very literal, “the fourth part of the earth.” As our translation suggests, we need not understand the Greek text’s “one quarter of the earth” as a mathematical literalism. Rather it represents a way of saying, “a great deal,” “a whole bunch.” Large swaths of the earth and its populations were given over to, or, perhaps better, gave themselves up to the dominion of violent Death and insatiable Hell. With this unchecked dominion came unimaginable death. The text, then, does not demand that we anticipate 25% of the planet being dominated by violent Death and Hell. Nor does it demand that we anticipate a 25% death rate among human beings hunted by Death and Hell. In fact, as we shall see, the death rate can, and often has climbed much higher.

⁷ Alma 62.⁴¹

Even if we were to resort to mathematical literalism and assume that one quarter of the earth's population (or more) was engaged in warfare and, perhaps, one quarter of the earth's population (or more) lay dead and dying on the ground, there would be no reason to assume that we were viewing a unique and future catastrophe.

The number of individuals who have been emmeshed in war and died a violent death is staggering, truly astronomical. Have a look, for example at the chart in this endnote.¹ It reports the number of people who died of “democide,” or death at the hands of one's own government—only one of many forms violent death can take—during just one century, the 20th. Look at those numbers! How is this not insanity?⁸

Now, imagine a chart that adds the number of military deaths as a consequence of war. Now, add to that chart the number of civilian deaths as a consequence of war. By some counts, such deaths could be as high as 100 million during that same dark 20th century alone, and as many as one-half to a full billion throughout human history. Now calculate the number of people who have died of violent murder. Calculate the number of women—far more likely to be war victims than is appreciated—who have been violently raped, killed during war and peace. Calculate the number of children whose lives have been shattered, if they survived at all, as they were left bereft of one or both parents and made homeless through the violence of war.

Even if what the Revelator sees is a 25% violent death rate, it need not be thought of as either a purely future and “end-times” phenomenon, nor a matter of poetic license and hyperbole. We have already witnessed something like it in the 20th century. Likely, every century has seen something like it. It all confirms the Revelator's larger point: Earth is one hell of a violent place.

How utterly appropriate it is that the Bible reports as its very first story about mortal beings

⁸ What percent of America's native population died violent death at the hands of white Europeans during the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th centuries? The estimates run as high as 80%. That's a hell of a lot higher than 25%. Even the supposed “innocent” perpetrator of death—European borne diseases—were often purposefully inflicted upon populations with the sure knowledge that it would kill them.

the story of a violent murder; Cain, driven by the desire to excel and conquer, killed his brother, Abel. Few things are more appropriate to or emblematic of the human condition than violence. Violent death is no stranger in this strange land called ‘Earth.’

This. This, with much else, is what the Revelator seeks to lay bare with his four horsemen of the apocalypse. And still, we ignore him. Still, we go on our merry way buying up armies and navies and reigning with blood and horror on this earth. Lunacy. Madness. Surely there can be no doubting the accuracy of “The Preacher’s” inspired and tragic observation.

“The heart of the sons of men is full of evil,
and madness is in their heart while they live.”⁹

We can almost hear the Revelator shout a loud, “Amen, brother.”

illustration

With each horse, we have turned to the Book of Mormon and its account of Amlici and Amalickiah, two conspiracists turned military leaders, turned monarchs. We did this for two reasons. First, these two men illustrate the insights that John was sharing through his violent horsemen. Second, the two men illustrate that the phenomenon that John is exposing through his four horsemen are not limited to “end times,” but have been present throughout human history.

In examining the white horse and its rider, we saw that both Amlici and Amalickiah were consumed with the same unholy desire to conquer, dominate, and rule at any cost. Violence was their go-to instrument for dominance. In examining the red horse and its rider, we saw that their desires for dominance and willingness to utilize violence as a means to that dominance sent their and surrounding nations into bloody war. Deaths multiplied. In examining the black horse, we saw that death was not limited to military personnel. Civilians died violent and agonizing deaths both through the violence of war itself and through

⁹ Ecclesiastes 9.³

economic privations brought on by war. Now that we have examined the pale horse, we return to the Book of Mormon to illustrate the truths that the Revelator reveals through his final horse and rider.

With the pale horse, war and violence and death have spiraled out of control. The number of individuals—military personnel and civilian—dead and dying are astronomical. People are dying at rates so high that survivors find it impossible to bury them. Many are not buried, their corpses scattered across the landscape serving as food for all sorts of vermin and a breeding ground for all sorts of diseases. Hell feeds on the dead with all the gusto of the rats and dogs and wild beasts.

We see the level of carnage in a Book of Mormon passage such as this.

“And it came to pass that the Nephites who were not slain by the weapons of war, after having buried those who had been slain—now *the number of the slain were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number*—after they had finished burying their dead they all returned to their lands, and to their houses, and their wives, and their children.”¹⁰

We see the unburied bodies.

“Yea, they were met on every hand, and slain and driven, until they were scattered on the west, and on the north, until they had reached the wilderness, which was called Hermounts; and it was that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts. And many died in the wilderness of their wounds, and were *devoured by those beasts and also the vultures of the air; and their bones have been found, and have been heaped up on the earth.*”¹¹

We have already referenced an earlier Book of Mormon manifestation of this phenomenon.

¹⁰ Alma 3. ¹, emphasis added

¹¹ Alma 2. ³⁷⁻³⁸, emphasis added

“And so great and lasting had been the war, and so long had been the scene of bloodshed and carnage, that *the whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead*. And so swift and speedy was the war that there was *none left to bury the dead*, but they did march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood, leaving the bodies of both men, women, and children strewed upon the face of the land, to become a prey to the worms of the flesh. And the *scent thereof went forth upon the face of the land*, even upon all the face of the land; wherefore *the people became troubled by day and by night, because of the scent thereof*.”¹²

Alma records the inhumanity of mass death and the careless attitudes that the living developed toward the dead and dying.

“Now the number of their dead was not numbered because of the greatness of the number; yea, the number of their dead was exceedingly great, both on the Nephites and on the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did cast their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea.”¹³

The same writer was discerning enough to see the same companion riding with death that John witnessed: Hell.

“Now, they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea, and this was not all—they were *sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God*.”¹⁴

All of this, and much, much more, is a real-life illustration of what the Revelator portrays in his wonderfully hellish Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

¹² Ether 14.²¹⁻²³

¹³ Alma 44.²¹⁻²²

¹⁴ Alma 48.²³

We would perhaps do a disservice to the reader and leave them without one of the best illustrations of John’s four horsemen if we denied them a view of the four horsemen’s wildest ride in the Book of Mormon, a ride such as they have repeated many times over. So, before launching into our concluding remarks on this set of homilies on John’s four horsemen, we should have a look at the four Rough Riders as seen through the eyes of one of their innumerable chroniclers... and victims... Mormon.

Though Mormon did “not desire to harrow up the souls of men in casting before them such an awful scene of blood and carnage as was laid before mine eyes,”¹⁵ he nevertheless shared enough for us to see in those awful scenes John’s four horsemen as they and their horses stampeded across the landscape, stomping all life under the horses’ hardened huffs. For, says he, “I, knowing that these things must surely be made known, and that all things which are hid must be revealed upon the house-tops—and also that a knowledge of these things must come unto the remnant of these people, and also unto the Gentiles... therefore I write a small abridgment, daring not to give a full account of the things which I have seen, because of the commandment which I have received, and also that ye might not have too great sorrow because of the wickedness of this people.”¹⁶

It was, he laments, “one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land.”¹⁷ Indeed, “a continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of men.”¹⁸ Having said that, he confesses his weakness in describing the full extent of the madness that every day assaulted his senses.

“And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in

¹⁵ Mormon 5.⁸

¹⁶ Mormon 5.⁸⁻⁹

¹⁷ Mormon 2.⁸

¹⁸ Mormon 2.¹⁸

the shedding of blood continually.”¹⁹

But, he gives it the good ol’ college try. For example, he catalogues some of the military deaths of battle.

“*They did fall upon my people with the sword, and with the bow, and with the arrow, and with the ax, and with all manner of weapons of war. *My men were hewn down, yea, even my ten thousand who were with me, and I fell wounded in the midst; and they passed by me that they did not put an end to my life... and we having survived the dead of our people, did behold on the morrow, when the Lamanites had returned unto their camps, from the top of the hill Cumorah, the ten thousand of my people who were hewn down, being led in the front by me.

“And we also beheld the ten thousand of my people who were led by my son Moroni.

“And behold, the ten thousand of Gidgiddonah had fallen, and he also in the midst.

“And Lamah had fallen with his ten thousand;

“and Gilgal had fallen with his ten thousand;

“and Limhah had fallen with his ten thousand;

“and Jeneum had fallen with his ten thousand;

“and Cumenihah,

“and Moronihah,

“and Antionum,

¹⁹ Mormon 4.¹¹

“and Shiblom,

“and Shem,

“and Josh, had fallen with their ten thousand each...

“And* there were ten more who did fall by the sword, with their ten thousand each...”²⁰

This is just the sort of “accomplishment” that the Revelator’s four Rough Riders with their companion, Hell, could be proud. But, however proud, it is never enough until everyone suffers. Economies must be shattered.

“Whatsoever lands we had passed by, and the inhabitants thereof were not gathered in, were destroyed by the Lamanites, and their towns, and villages, and cities were burned with fire...”²¹

And everyone—men, women, and children alike, must be sacrificed to the gods of war.

“They did also march forward against the city Teancum, and did drive the inhabitants forth out of her, and did take many prisoners both women and children, and did offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods.”²²

Soon, the pale rider, Death, began to feed on death. Bodies are left to molder. But soon far worse happens as humans themselves join in the feeding frenzy.

“My people, the Nephites... began to boast in their own strength, and began to swear before the heavens that they would avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren who had been slain by their enemies. And they did swear by the heavens, and also by the throne of God, that they would go up to battle against their enemies, and would cut them

²⁰ Mormon 6.¹⁰⁻¹⁵

²¹ Mormon 5.⁵

²² Mormon 4.¹⁴

off from the face of the land... And when they had sworn by all that had been forbidden them by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that they would go up unto their enemies to battle, and avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren, behold the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: ‘Vengeance is mine, and I will repay; and because this people repented not after I had delivered them, behold, they shall be cut off from the face of the earth.’”²³

As always, Hell went along on the joy ride.

“And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually.”²⁴

“They were once a delightsome people, and they had Christ for their shepherd; yea, they were led even by God the Father. But now, behold, they are led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her; and even as she is, so are they.”²⁵

“End-times,” indeed. End-times” for a nation. That’s the thing with “end-times.” They occur over and over again. Always have. They are not limited to “latter-days.” And, still, we learn nothing.

Indeed, the destructive antics of these four horsemen are not even limited to “earth-times,” as John the Revelator will reveal as he recapitulates the whole sordid mess later in his book. No, it all began in heaven with a megalomaniac by the name of Lucifer, who, driven by the unholy and ungodly desire to conquer, rule, and dominate sought to dethrone God— “give me thy honor”—by any means necessary, thus bringing war and spiritual death to heaven. The death rate was high—one-third of heaven’s population by scripture’s count. That is to

²³ Mormon 3.^{9-10, 14-15}

²⁴ Mormon 4.¹¹

²⁵ Mormon 5.¹⁷⁻¹⁸

say, a whole bunch!

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.”²⁶

This defeat, however, did not staunch his unholy, insatiable, and rebellious desires or put an end to his wars and rumors of wars. He simply moved his war to a new theater.

“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”²⁷

He has been at it ever since. And everywhere and at all times, humankind has been falling for his lies, buying up armies and navies and attempting to reign through blood and horror. This, notwithstanding a loving God’s constant warnings and wise directions. How much human blood has been spilt because humans can’t or won’t abide by the simplest, most common-sensical instruction imaginable—that found in the final and all-encompassing commandment of the Ten Commandments? The commandment that warns us about our unholy desires.

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.”²⁸

Yes, it all started with a desire. It all flowed out of a deeply corrupt heart. It has overflowed to produce fields of corpses, billions of victims to human—and, often, inhuman—violence. Few have been spared, military or civilian. It has brought entire civilizations to ruin, time and time and time again.

John the Revelator exposed this whole sordid mess through his Four Horsemen of the

²⁶ Revelation 12.⁷⁻⁸

²⁷ Revelation 12.¹²

²⁸ Exodus 20.¹⁷

Apocalypse. But the revelation served to do more than inform and educate. It was meant as a call to action. True disciples of Christ, having been warned and forewarned, were ever and always to be a voice of resistance. They were to ever and always “renounce war and proclaim peace.”²⁹

But, alas, we must report the sad truth that those who profess to follow the prince of peace have all too often failed in their calling. Too often they have followed—and that enthusiastically, “patriotically”—the prince of darkness,” thus committing fornication with the GREAT WHORE, BABYLON and leaving the world without the savor of salt and vulnerable to its own dark “madness [that] is in their heart.”³⁰

The warning has been renewed in our day.

“And again, I say unto you that the enemy in the secret chambers seeketh your lives. Ye hear of wars in far countries, and you say that there will soon be great wars in far countries, but ye know not the hearts of men in your own land. I tell you these things because of your prayers; wherefore, treasure up wisdom in your bosoms, lest the wickedness of men reveal these things unto you by their wickedness, in a manner which shall speak in your ears with a voice louder than that which shall shake the earth; but if ye are prepared ye shall not fear. And that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless—”³¹

As always, we are free to choose what we will do. Will we be part of that body of Christ that is “gathered... out of every nation under heaven... the only people that shall not be at war one with another,”³² or will we continue to live comfortably in Babylon until it falls and squashes us under the weight of its own violence?

When, oh when, will we break from the violent tyranny of John’s Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?

²⁹ DC 98.¹⁶

³⁰ Ecclesiastes 9.³

³¹ DC 38.²⁸⁻³¹

³² DC 45.⁶⁹

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

i

