

Rev 26-01-04b

We resume our investigations here in Revelation chapter six, as we have seen, there is a wonderful aspect of this section of the Revelation that is communicated to us by understanding the role of the four living creatures. One of the things this does, and you don't necessarily have to worry about this unless you are contending with modern and postmodern reinterpretations of Revelation, corruptions and defilements of Revelation, if you want my opinion. But there is this view, there is a belief among the more liberal purveyors of Christian thought that God doesn't really judge anyone.

By failing to avail ourselves of His grace and salvation, people sort of suffer self-inflicted wounds and self-induced misery. And God does not take an active role in bringing negative circumstances or judgments on anyone. And when the Lord Jesus opens these seals, these people, when they come to the Revelation, believe that this is maybe the lifting of divine suppression of evil and that man just does this to himself.

It's a lamb opening the seals and he's peaceful and he's non-violent and lambs don't harm anyone or cause any kind of bloodshed. All he's doing is letting people inflict harm on themselves. A proper understanding of the Bible in general, prophetic warnings in particular, and the Revelation in great pointed particularity, recognizes that God is active in implementing judgment when the opportunity for deliverance and salvation is ignored.

When the proffer of His grace and His salvation is pushed aside in an arrogant and self-sufficient fashion, judgment will come from God. So reviewing quickly now what we have learned in our first session, the first living creature like a lion in Ezekiel, the face like a lion. Lions in scripture, this is communicative, it is metaphorical, it speaks of regal authority, reigning authority, dominion and conquest, allowing the unfolding of evil conquest and calling for it as a judgment is reminiscent of God in the Old Testament calling forth Assyria to be a judgment on Northern Israel.

Assyria is the rod of mine anger and the staff of mine indignation it says in the King James as judgment falls on the Northern Kingdom where Ahab and Jezebel held sway, where Elijah endeavored to call the people back to faithfulness and obedience and was ignored. A short brief response after Mount Carmel quickly fades much as other revivals will do in the Southern Kingdom under Josiah and Hezekiah. A brief flash in the pan, it's the parable of the soils when the Lord Jesus said some of the seed falls in shallow soil, it springs up in a day, but when the sun rises, time passes, a little bit of heat hits it, it shrivels up and it is as though the seed was never there, nothing remains.

So the lion imagery, this white horseman goes forth conquering and to conquer. So this is the assertion of dominion and dictatorial expansion and victory by force and by authority. And this, whether you see this horseman as actually being the Antichrist or just laying the groundwork for who I prefer to call the first beast, he's never called the Antichrist in Revelation, but that's

the popular and convenient name.

We may wonder whether these horsemen represent the implementation of his appearance on the scene, but however you understand this horseman, and we'll talk about this a bit later, whether it is a deceptive conquest, whether it is laying the groundwork for oppression, it is consistent with, there are people who want to say that the white horse is Christ himself. I disagree. What I have just detailed is my belief.

I think this is the first phase that lays the groundwork and introduces the hegemony and the ultimate dictatorship of the first beast, popularly called the Antichrist. And the groundwork is laid and the authority begins to be exercised with the appearance of the rider on the first horse, the white horse. He's riding a white horse.

He's got to be a good guy. If they had had Westerns in those days, he'd be wearing a white hat and he fools everyone into thinking this is the answer. But his agenda is conquering and to conquer.

And this individual has a bow, but it doesn't say that he's got arrows or that he uses the bow. He has a bow. And it reminds me of the fascia, the scepter that is held by ruling monarchs back to the dark, dim origins in antiquity.

He doesn't actually beat people over the head with it, but it is a club. It is a symbolic weapon. I was regaling my family with a comparison that involved my Marine Corps officer's sword, the Mameluke, which is carried in a symbolic fashion by Marine officers.

It harks back to an early Marine Corps victory. But when you obtain one of those as a fresh second lieutenant, you have a choice. I got the hillborne hamburger, a symbolic thing.

It's made of pot metal. It's shiny. It's got my name engraved on it.

It's got a scabbard and it looks good. You wear it. You can make a sword arch out of it when your friends get married.

You can do symbolic things with it at Marine Corps functions, especially if you're wearing your blues. It used to be we had whites as well. But no, we don't cut cakes.

I object. You will never see me cut a cake with my sword. I just think that's blasphemy.

That's another topic. My point about the sword is most of us could only afford the pot metal version. It does not have an edge.

It is a purely symbolic accessory. Some guys who came from well-off families and had resources would actually send off to Wilkinson or to European makers and get a genuine tempered steel edged sword that you can do significant damage with. It's a real honest to goodness, no kidding sword.

We always covet and crave one like that, but they're beyond the reach of anybody with common sense. Why would you spend that much money on something you're never going to ride into battle on a horse and start hacking and slashing as they did in days of old? The symbolic sword is fine. But I think of that when I look at this individual on the white horse who carries a bow and he's going forth conquering and to conquer, but he doesn't seem to do it by force.

This is representative. Remember the lion. You don't see this lion actually tearing other beasts and submitting creation to his will.

He is the lion. The lion of the tribe of Judah is an expression of kingly authority. So he's got two symbolic accessories.

He's wearing a crown and he's got this bow. And I think this is much like a scepter, but the bow in contradistinction to a fascia or a scepter. This is where the term fascist comes from.

One who waves his scepter around dominating others. The bow is the threat of force. This is sort of, I will accomplish peace through strength.

And it's something to watch for. If someone has a doomsday weapon, they don't have to use it. The suppressing force of that weapon and its possession is often enough to forestall actual military conflict.

So he's got some kind of a bow and a crown and notice the crown is given to him. He doesn't inherit it. He doesn't achieve it by conquest himself.

Someone says, this guy ought to lead. And this could be by acclimation. It could be by the voting process, but this crown is given to him.

But he's got this bow and he goes forth conquering and to conquer. And this conquest seems to be achieved, at least in the view of what is detailed here, without bloodshed. That is how this person is on top.

He achieves his position of apparently global authority by other than warfare. Warfare comes with the second horse. And so the ox representative living creature is associated with symbolically strength, labor, and sacrifice.

This is God's way. Humility, as we have defined it from scripture, is not kicking your toe in the dirt and oh, I'm so humble and I'm self-deprecating and I, oh no, aw shucks. That's not biblical humility.

Biblical humility is strength harnessed, strength under control, strength that is directed in the service of God, that turns neither to the right hand nor to the left, but plows a straight furrow, lays a straight course in the word of God. Remember that the rightly dividing the word of truth portion of the description of God's word. If you are properly understanding scripture, you're laying a straight course.

Strength, labor, sacrifice. If you reject God's way and you do not subject yourself, if we do not humble ourselves before God so that He can exalt us in due time, if we are not dedicated to His way and His will and His word, what is the alternative? The red horse. War consumes the strength of nations.

Look at the ongoing conflict on the other side of the world from us, the one that our president has yet to bring to a peaceful conclusion, and it is sapping the resources. It is diminishing greatly the strength of both of those entities as they tear each other apart and destroy their cities and kill their populations. War consumes strength and results in slaughter.

The red horse takes peace from the earth. So this hegemony represented by the first white horse and the one who rides it is going to be disrupted by peace being taken from the earth. So the symbolic value of the second seal, the second horseman, violent expenditure of strength, sacrificial loss of life, that's what's going on.

And it's, you might say, ironic in a grim way because the animal that is most associated with sacrificial death, the ox, summons this agent of massive bloodshed and loss of peace, and it sharpens the contrast. Are we willing to accept God's sacrifice on our behalf as a substitution for what we deserve? If not, this is the alternative. This is the consequence.

The third horse called, summoned by the living creature with a face like a man. This symbolically speaks of rationality and as an expression of our intelligence, unlike any other living beasts and animals on the planet, we engage in commerce, we barter, we trade, we have an economy, we have a social order, we have constraints, we enforce laws, regulations, and so on. So what happens when the black horse appears and the horseman upon it has in his hand a pair of scales? This introduces a damaging level of control over commerce and the social order.

So measured grain, high prices, and scarcity are reflected. You can see that there is a falling of dominoes here where you first have this world ruler who comes in deceptively with a program of peace through strength, but inevitably the peace is taken and warfare results with the second horse. That warfare by sapping the strength and the resources of the involved parties results in scarcity, rationing.

A few people are still around who remember the rationing that took place in this country during World War II. I was going through some stuff that belonged to my ancestors and forebears and I've actually got some ration books with stamps in it and you had to wait to buy things made of rubber. You had to for certain kinds of groceries.

You had to participate in this rationing that tried to make sure everybody got a little bit of very scarce resources. That's what's reflected with that third horseman. This is man's effort to control the damage introduced by warfare, bloodshed, violence, and disruption.

Calculation, balance, restraint, we'll try to solve this ourselves. There is no turning to God, you notice, with the appearance of the white horse. There is no turning to God.

There is no appeal to divine intervention or salvation when warfare breaks out worldwide. This will be the inception of what you might call the third world war. Instead, man tries to do it himself and human government is going to be strained to the limits and there will be hardship, injustice, there will be famine as we see in the unfolding description to follow.

Finally, the fourth seal and you see the intentionality of these judgments, these conditions appearing on the earth, it originates at the throne of God. This isn't just man left to man's devices failing and hurting himself. God initiates these judgments.

He writes them in a scroll and waits for their implementation to a particular point in human history. At that point, after the lamb has been slain and as it were, the Lord Jesus has come into his own and his own receive him not, both in Israel and in the world, that scroll is handed to the slain and resurrected lamb who is now going to open those seals. And when each seal of these first four opens, a living creature, the individuals who surround God's throne are going to call these judgments forth in an active fashion.

This is directly through the chain of command from the throne to cause these conditions so that when the fourth seal is opened by the Lord Jesus Christ, the lamb as it had been slain, the fourth living creature with a face in Ezekiel and with the appearance in chapter four, like an Eagle, that which soars and sees from a divine perspective, you have associated with the Eagle. Remember, they who wait upon the Lord will not be constrained by what happens on the earth. They have this old saying, it's hard to soar with the Eagles when you're down here, you know, consorting with the turkeys.

How can you rise above? We will mount up with wings as Eagles when we wait upon the Lord. The Eagle is linked with speed, with elevation, with height, rising above, seeing from a high perspective. And also it is a predatory bird.

You can put with this Job 39, 27 through 30, what you might call predatory oversight, Job 39, 27 through 30. And notice that when the creature like an Eagle calls and says, come, this pale horse brings two riders, death and Hades. We'll look at the distinction between those two in lessons to come.

We don't need it right now. They are not distinguished here. It is enough to see that this is sort of a double whammy, white horse, red horse, black horse, with the pale horse, the last of the horse judgments, if you will, it's double.

There is an acceleration. You start with sort of a false peace, people believing that with the right human government, everything will be okay. With the threat of mayhem, the bow, with the crown given to the right individual, we will submit, we will allow this government, this will be the be all and end all.

But instead conflict, war and bloodshed ensue with the resulting effect, even on those that aren't directly involved in the conflict. The armies, the navies, the fighting individuals are

suffering slaughter and bloodshed, but it spills over to the civilian population with famine, with rationing, with the sucking away of resources in this conflict. There is an acceleration and it ultimately results in widespread death, death and Hades.

We tend to compare and contrast heaven and hell, going up or going down. Here at the point of death, there is no upward path. Death appears and what appears with it? Hades, imprisonment in the power of death.

Remember David famously says in his prayer to God, you will not abandon my soul in Hades. You will lift me up. You will restore me.

You will bring me to life everlasting. Death is not a termination point with no escape and no future. But here when death comes, Hades comes with it.

There is no opportunity for deliverance. It's not two paths when death comes. There's only one and it's a downward path.

It's the Sheol, Hades destination that comes with death. Death for these people doesn't have hope. You don't have my soul will rest in hope.

That's why Hades accompanies death here to tell you this death is not a deliverance. It's not a way to escape everything else that is going to unfold. It's a bad death.

This green horse, if you look at the Greek, pale doesn't really do it justice. This is the green of a decaying corpse. It's not a pretty sight.

It's a horrific color, a horrific expectation. And there is no hope associated with this death. Sword, famine, pestilence, wild beasts bring about this.

This is not falling asleep in Jesus. This isn't a peaceful exit. So inescapable, far-reaching judgment, sweeping down from above.

This again is divinely ordained, just like Assyria. The rod of my anger, the staff of my indignation, I bring this harsh, bloody, and awful judgment. If you don't die from the sword, you die from pestilence.

If you don't die from pestilence, you die from uncontrollable violence, the wild beasts, crime running rampant, roving gangs, breaking into houses to see what's there that they can take by force, and killing the occupants in the process. That's the wild beast aspect. So what does that mean for us? First of all, what does this communicate to us? There is intentionality.

There is a divine purpose in these seal judgments. The living creatures are the guardians of God's throne. I wish we had time to go back and review in detail Ezekiel chapter one and Ezekiel chapter 10.

These four creatures are reintroduced to John because he knows exactly who they are from his

knowledge of Ezekiel. They are the same creatures, and we know about them from Ezekiel. And they are associated with the throne of God and as both guardians and proclaimers of the holiness of God.

In Ezekiel, they are the ones who ensure that as God moves in his throne chariot, there is no defilement. There is nothing that touches the righteousness of God, and there is nothing that resists the judgment of God. These are powerful creatures.

So they're not just passive worshipers. They're not just a looped recording that says, holy, holy, holy. They are actively involved in implementing both the righteousness and the justice of God.

And it's important to remember that God is active. He is not passively seated in heaven. In Ezekiel, he moves, and he is moving because there are things going on with his people.

What is the overarching theme and thread in Ezekiel? This is a little pop quiz. If you haven't been through Ezekiel, I'm about to tell you. But if you have been, do you remember the divine movement in Ezekiel? This is a clue.

Where does the glory of God reside in Israel when Ezekiel begins? You have the tabernacle, later the temple with its outer court, altar of sacrifice, the bronze laver. Then you have the holy place as you enter the building itself, the tent itself, with the table of showbread on the right, the menorah on the left. And I have a new insight.

I think the table of showbread on the right represents God's people, the bread on the table supported by wood overlaid with gold, which is the humanity and deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what makes it possible for the bread to be that close to God's presence. But on the left, that seven-branch menorah, it's solid gold.

I think that may be the seven spirits of God who shine and flame before God's throne. And you wouldn't know it until the fullness of God's revelation unfolds in scripture. But that menorah, and again, the spirit of God, the oil that fuels those flames.

This is the power of God implemented in and through a seven-fold light source. Then before the veil, you have the golden altar of incense. And we are told several times that that smoke from the incense, that sweet-smelling represents prayers of God's people, God's sanctified ones.

Then the veil representing the Lord Jesus Christ when it is torn. He, by a new and living way, grants access into the holiest place, the Holy of Holies, where there is the Ark of the Covenant. That's one piece of furniture for Israel.

It contained, if you remember, three things. Remember the three original things that are in the Ark of the Covenant? I'll give you a second. There's the tables of the law.

There is Aaron's rod that budded, authority and priestly function, bringing life. It's not just a

dead stick. And the pot of manna, God's provision to sustain life, to honor his promise, to remind his people daily of his covenant grace and favor on those who are faithful and obedient.

Atop the Ark is a separate item, which is the mercy seat, the invisible presence of God surrounded by two of the four cherubim with their wings extended and touching above the invisible presence of God. The mercy seat on which the blood of atonement is sprinkled once a year on the day of atonement by the one individual authorized to enter, the high priest. So much imagery, so much communicated about the righteousness and justice of God, as well as the means of approach through sacrifice.

The blood of goats and bulls could never take away sin. It foreshadowed the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as the lamb slain, accomplishes salvation, the opportunity to be personally, individually related to God and to come into his presence fully qualified, because our hearts have been sprinkled and our evil conscience has been cleansed. And our physical existence is washed with pure water.

All of this in Hebrews, largely chapter 10. So the living creatures here are involved in the process. Why couldn't we have written an alternate version of revelation where the lamb opens the first seal and behold, a horse rides forth? Why does the living creature speak and say, come? It is a reminder that this is happening at God's initiation.

It is his plan. It is his purpose. It is his authority traveling through the lamb and the living creature.

These things all happen in order and are associated and related for a purpose. Remember when I said, take note of the description of the lamb in the preceding chapter, what characterizes him? There are two sets of seven associated with the lamb. What are they? Seven eyes and seven horns, right? Eyes always speak of observation and knowledge, awareness of everything that's going on.

Seven means it's perfect. There's nothing that he doesn't know. Horns, Old Testament and new, whether they're on the altar or they're on an ox or they are on any other symbolic expression represent authority.

This is power expressed. Oxen have horns and they are powerful beasts. So you have the involvement of the living creatures.

They are also full of eyes like the lamb. And that ties these together even more closely. Part of the full knowledge of the lamb is expressed both in the knowledge and the power of the four living creatures.

And when they say come, here come the horsemen. It is directly related. What does that mean to us by way of application? This is why it is so critical to understand prayer.

We pray an inexpressibly great privilege. We pray directly to God Almighty, the creator of the

universe, our God and heavenly father. We pray to him because all action, all power, all policy, all circumstance is under his divine authority.

And we through Christ are given this inestimable privilege of addressing our requests, our thanksgiving, our concerns directly to the highest authority there is, which is God the father, God Almighty, God the creator. He will then answer through agency. And it is through the Lord Jesus Christ, who notice is second only to God.

From the Lord Jesus Christ there are agents, whether it be the living creatures, whether it be the seven spirits that are before the throne, whether it is other angels. You hear of Gabriel and Michael in the Old Testament and in the new who appear and communicate and in Daniel battle and participate in unseen conflict. That's a whole story unto itself.

But there is an order and there is an agency that acts on our behalf as long as we are aware and we meet the conditions to receive God's grace. It isn't merit. It isn't effort.

It is acknowledgment and receiving of God's work on our behalf. And those who don't, this is the result. There is a miniature of this in our own lives.

If we get distracted, if we begin to think that life is about being in the world and getting things done and eating and drinking and carrying on in human affairs and spending time with entertainment or on the internet or engaging in various pursuits, and we lose the awareness of what is really going on, this is a stage play. This is just a story problem and a pale reflection of the realities that exist in heaven and in the invisible realms that surround us. God is at work in our midst, scripture says, to will and to do for his good purpose.

These four living creatures are active agents implementing and bringing about the fulfillment of God's plans and purposes. And these judgments that we're seeing unfold in chapter six and following proceed from God's throne. It's not just human chaos and man shooting himself in the foot.

Anybody who says that does not know scripture. God will actively bring about consequences for unfaithfulness, rejection, disobedience, and it's harsh. The four faces also in the same way that there are four of them and they are multi-dimensional, each of them can reflect a face at different times as we saw in Ezekiel, but they also as another aspect of their symbolic function represent domains of creation.

So you have the lion, this is symbolic of the wild untameable animal kingdom that cannot be domesticated. I always think of zebras as opposed to horses. They look alike, but you cannot domesticate zebras.

This is why they didn't ride zebras in Africa. Wild beasts, the ox, domesticated animals, those that can be tamed and penned and put to purposes that benefit mankind. Humanity itself, and then birds.

I think if this was just supposed to represent the bird kingdom, why isn't there a fifth one that is a fish? You could say, well, birds occupy the heavens and that's closer to God. Fish are in the sea, which represents the untamed chaotic forces of darkness, but it represents aspects that we see in creation and judgment affects all of creation. Remember it says in Romans 8.20-22, all of creation groans, waiting for the redemption of the children of God.

All creation suffers. And we're going to see in these following judgments, how much of an effect these unfolding judgments have, not just on humanity, but on the entire earth. So judgment affects creation and it is often mediated through creation.

Famine is a scarcity in the world of crops. The created order itself, both animate and inanimate can be an agency of judgment. These same four faces appear in Ezekiel, both chapter one and chapter 10, in a context of divine judgment on Jerusalem.

And they are both heralds of and executors of God's judgment. Are you in the covenant promises or are you outside? Have you qualified or have you not? Can you experience God's grace and God's deliverance and God's salvation? Not only for ultimate eternal salvation, but today, are we qualified for God to bless us, to smooth our path, to put to flight what opposes us, whether it's human enemies or circumstantial problems. There is a structure here in Revelation and it is intentional.

Only these first four seals are verbally announced and they are announced by the only beings that have a differentiated identity. We're not given names of the 24 elders. We're not told that there are individuals that are discernible amongst the seven spirits before the throne, but these four living creatures are identified individually and each of them announces these seals and that is significant.

And so our conclusion here is there is a purpose for this and it ought to make a difference in how we think about ourselves and our place in God's plan and purpose. We want to be those who are on the benefit side, the blessing side, not those who through indifference or apathy or distraction are too much in this world and end up being judged by circumstances and situations in the world that cause conflict instead of peace, deprivation instead of provision. And sorrow and misery instead of the peace of God that passes all understanding in our souls.

The opportunity to be used in a constructive way to reflect God's glory rather than to have the heat of that glory in judgment consume us. God's not kidding around. There are two kinds of people, those who respond, who are drawn by God, those who reject and will be judged by God.

What are we going to do in the light of what we have seen with the lifting of these four seals? That's the question. And hopefully we can answer it in a positive way. We will be on the positive side of the implementation of God's plan and purpose and end up in indescribable realms of glory and a peace that passes all understanding.

We'll continue our study this Wednesday night. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for this revelation, which you have given to us through the Lord Jesus, through the angel, through the Apostle John, and in the hands of messengers that speak it to the churches.

It can bless all of us with the opportunity to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, as Paul says in Romans 12, holy and acceptable in your sight, so that we are on the positive side of history and of the unfolding of your plan and purpose, that we can share with the Lord Jesus Christ in the reflection of your glory and the accomplishment of your present and future purposes. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us to see the pertinence and application in our own individual lives. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.