

# FIRST HORSEMAN OF THE APOCALYPSE

**FOUR LIVING CREATURES:** “Come!” or “Go!” are commands issued by the four living creatures (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7). But they are ambiguous: Are the living creatures telling John to come to another location or telling the four horsemen to start their rides? If this living creature is issuing a command to the first horseman, then he has been given authority to begin the Tribulation—to set in motion the first seal judgment. The living creatures, then, are the effective agents of judgment; and, following orders from their superiors, the horsemen are the intermediate agents. Four judgments; four living creatures; and four horsemen. These living creatures are similar but not identical to cherubim and are powerful angels (Rev 4–5)—on par with Satan, a cherub (Ezek 28:14). As the closest angels to God’s throne, it’s fitting that they be given authority to start the process of redeeming the earth. They may be, I believe, witnesses and signers of the seven-sealed scroll—the title deed to the earth (Rev 5). And, as witnesses, it’s their moral responsibility to enforce Satan’s breach of contract. At the beginning of the Tribulation, Satan refuses to release control and vacate the earth as agreed to centuries earlier in the repurchase agreement—as stated in the terms and conditions of “the deed of purchase” (cf. Jer 32:6–15). He has been “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31) for 6000 years and will resist giving it up. To him fighting seems better than submitting voluntarily to his doom. Now, in God’s righteous view of justice, witnesses are enjoined to be the first to strike criminals: “The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst” (Deut 17:7). Note: by this law a false witness is guilty of premeditated murder! I believe the Apocalypse follows this pattern of divine justice: as witnesses, the four living creatures strike the first four blows at Satan’s kingdom, followed by the hand of all the angels (trumpet angels, bowl angels, Michael and his angels who battle in heaven, angel with a sharp sickle, et al.). And, since the Apocalypse is mainly concerned with judgment, it’s logical that God will follow his inherent sense of justice and the corresponding laws decreed for his Theocratic and Millennial Kingdoms. A living creature also initiates the bowl judgments: “And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever” (Rev 15:7). And they may initiate the trumpet judgments by giving trumpets to the trumpeting angels: “And I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and seven trumpets were given to them” (Rev 8:2).

**FIRST HORSEMAN:** The first rider may be the Antichrist, a demon, an elect angel, or Jesus. No identification is given. I believe the four horsemen of the Apocalypse are elect angels because the other series of judgments—the trumpets and bowls—are clearly poured out by elect angels. The seven trumpeters are explicitly identified as seven angels (Rev 8:2, 6, 8, 10, 12; 9:1) who “stand before God” (8:1). The sixth angel blows the sixth trumpet and releases “the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (9:14–15). And when the seventh angel blows his trumpet “there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God” (11:15–16). It’s hard to believe the sixth and seventh trumpeters are fallen angels. Similarly, the bowl judgments are clearly poured out by seven elect angels (15:1, 6, 7, 8; 16:1, 5; 17:1). They are “clothed in linen, clean *and* bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles” (15:6). That they are elect angels is clear from their comments: (1) the third angel says God is righteous in turning the rivers and springs into blood (16:4–6) and (2) another angel shows (17:1–3) and then interprets a vision for John (17:7–18). I think it’s less likely that the four horsemen are angelic witnesses and signers of the seven-sealed scroll. I believe the seven seals belong to the four living creatures, the deity of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father. The first four seal judgments are administered by powerful elect angels and the last three by each member of the Trinity. The last three appear to be administered by divine decree. The fifth seal judgment, for instance, is postponed by divine decree, to be implemented near the end of the Great Tribulation (17:1–19:4) perhaps by the deity of Christ (6:11); the sixth is a series of miracles beyond angelic power that the victims attribute to the Lamb (his humanity did not exist when the scroll was sealed) and to God the Father (6:16–17); and, by process of elimination, the seventh is an addition of seven more judgments (the trumpets) implemented by elect angels (intermediate agents) and by the Holy Spirit (immediate agent). It should be remembered that the Holy Spirit strove with men before the flood: “Then the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years’” (Gen 6:3).

**BOW:** The first rider is armed with a bow. No arrows are mentioned, but may be assumed; What good is a bow without arrows? In the ancient world a bow was a long-range offensive weapon. God is sometimes pictured as a warrior shooting arrows at his enemies from a bow: “If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts” (Psa 7:12–13). “But God will shoot at them with an arrow; Suddenly they will be wounded” (Psa 64:7). “Thine arrows are sharp; The peoples fall under Thee; *Thy arrows are* in the heart of the King’s enemies” (Psa 45:5). Or in biblical symbolism arrows may be lightning: “And He sent out His arrows, and scattered them, And lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them (Psa 18:14). “The clouds poured out water; The skies gave forth a sound; Thy arrows flashed here and there” (Psa 77:17). “Flash forth lightning and scatter them; Send out Thine arrows and confuse them” (Psa 144:6). Perhaps the first horseman shoots arrows as he rides and conquers. I believe this horseman conquers with lightning and severe electrical storms—setting fire to fields, houses, buildings, towns, and cities around the world. This is conquest, because towns and cities are left in ashes and probably not rebuilt—depriving the enemy of their use. The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments systematically reduce the usable land area controlled by the kingdom of Satan. This first seal judgment is the least severe of all tribulational judgments; it’s the very “beginning of birth pangs” (Matt 24:8). Compare the seventh plague on Egypt: “. . . the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. . . . So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation” (Exod 9:23–24). Perhaps the lightning of the first rider is likewise accompanied with thunder and large hailstones.

**WHITE HORSE:** Since the colors of the horses symbolize the judgments they deliver (red horse = blood; black horse = famine; green horse = fear of death or pallor of death), then the white horse is not symbolic of purity or righteousness, but the color of this judgment—white lightning against a dark background of storm clouds and victory over his enemies.

**CROWN:** The first rider is mounted, rides up to someone (perhaps an angel), and pauses, is given a crown to wear while he sits on his horse, and then gallops off to battle on earth. This crown (*stephanos*) not a diadem (ruling crown) but a military decoration for bravery, success, or victory in battle. A camp crown (*corona castrensis* or *corona vallaris*), for instance, was made of gold, decorated with palisades (*valli*), and “presented by a general to the soldier who is first to fight his way into a hostile camp; that crown represents a palisade” (Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 5.6.17). But such crowns were usually given *after* success in battle, not before. Apparently it’s given on the basis of God’s omniscience and is therefore a promise or guarantee of victory in battle.

**INCLUSIO:** If the objective of chapters 6 through 19 is to take back (redeem) the earth from Satan for mankind, then it makes sense that the agents dispensing judgment are elect angels. And if this is true, then, the first horseman is an elect angel and not a man (not the Antichrist or Jesus). Why would fallen angels weaken their own kingdom? Jesus said, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?” (Matt 12:25–26). This angel, riding out on a white horse “conquering, and to conquer,” forms an *inclusio* with Jesus riding out on a white horse to conquer his enemies at Armageddon. This *inclusio*, a common literary form in the Bible, frames the beginning and end of the conquest of planet earth. “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20)!