Exegetical Analysis of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

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**Introduction to Paper**

For nearly two thousand years, the book of Revelation has spawned numerous interpretations. The many apocalyptic images within the book have fired the imaginations of readers for centuries, both in the areas of biblical scholarship as well as within the secular world. One such image appears in chapter six of Revelation. The “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” as they have become known in the vernacular, have been the subject of much speculation. Mounce describes the image as one of the most recognizable symbols in the book.¹ The images drawn from John’s account of these four mysterious riders have been borrowed by the world, inspiring artists to attempt to capture the Apostle’s vision on canvas and even giving rise in college football to a nickname for a Notre Dame backfield many years ago. Speculation within the realm of Christianity has been almost as varied. One author, for example, claims that the white horse from Revelation 6:2 represents the United States, since the colors of its flag are red, white, and blue.² A well-known evangelist has written “the shadows of all four horsemen can already be seen galloping throughout the world at this moment.”³ Certainly, this portion of the book of Revelation has “had a long and checkered history of interpretation.”⁴ The four horses and their riders have been widely (and wildly) interpreted. However, careful exegesis – rather than haphazard eisegesis – of this passage will lead to a better understanding of the mysterious vision of the horsemen and their role in the entire revelation of God.

Before beginning an analysis of the four horsemen, it is both necessary and helpful to give a background of the passage in which they appear. First, this paper will deal specifically with Rev 6:1-8. These verses encompass the breaking of the first four of seven seals. However, they comprise

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4 Mounce, 140.
a single literary unit.⁵ Like the similar later visions of the trumpets (Rev 8-9) and the bowls (Rev 16), the seals are divided into two groupings of four and then three.⁶ Also, the effects of the horsemen seem to be summarized in the last part of verse 8.⁷ All of this indicates Rev 6:1-8 should be analyzed as a single passage. Secondly, the background of this passage should not be overlooked. The most obvious background for this passage is Zech 1:8-15 and Zech 6:1-8, where “four different groups of horses of different colors are commissioned by God to patrol the earth and punish those nations they see oppressing God’s people.”⁸ Ezek 14:12-23 is also an important Old Testament text to consider, especially since it is quoted in Rev 6:8.⁹ In the New Testament, the eschatological discourse of Jesus, found in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 24:6ff, Mk 13:7ff, and Lk 21:9ff), shares many similarities with Rev 6.¹⁰ This discourse is consistently alluded to throughout virtually all of Rev 6.¹¹ This is extremely important to note, and a correct interpretation of Rev 6:1-8 is virtually dependent on an understanding of Jesus’ discourse. Finally, the passage, and indeed the book of Revelation itself, is written in the genre of apocalyptic literature. Although this literary type will be discussed in more detail in an appendix to this paper, the passage should be read with the understanding that it is highly symbolic. Symbolism is a major component of apocalyptic literature.¹² A correct interpretation of the passage requires a correct understanding of this symbolism.

It may also be helpful to explore the background of this passage as it relates to pagan mythology. John borrows heavily from different sources, and he does not consider mythology to be

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⁶ Mounce, 140.
⁷ Aune, 389.
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Mounce, 140.
¹¹ Beale, 372.
¹² Ibid., 4.
off limits, although he does employ the imagery in unique ways in the book of Revelation. Aune mentions a parallel found in the works of Dio Chrysostom, which includes an account of the chariot of Zeus being pulled by four winged horses, the first of which is the color of fire and deserving of victory and a crown (την νικην και τον στεφανον). Charles describes an Oriental legend with four horsemen who are the original four gods of the world. The first, a sun god, rides a white horse, carries a bow, and wears a crown. The second is the god of war, and the third was the god of grain. Even if John did make use of these myths, he clearly put his (and the Holy Spirit’s) personal touch in writing Revelation. Nevertheless, the basis of these legends may lead to a clearer understanding of the passage in question.

**Interpretation of the Passage**

**Verse 1**

*And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying like the sound of thunder, “Come.”*

The discourse of John on the four horsemen begins with the Lamb breaking the first of seven seals on the scroll. The Lamb, of course, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only One worthy to open the scroll (Rev 5:2ff, NASB). The role of the Lamb cannot be overlooked in this passage. As Lambrecht comments, “the reader cannot but pay attention to the absolutely primary role of Lamb as unique subject of the action.” One of the four living creatures, first introduced in Rev 4:6ff and representative of an angelic being, speaks a solitary word with a voice like thunder: “Come.” Thunder is an interesting metaphorical device when describing the voice of the living creature. Thunder is used elsewhere in Revelation by John to describe an extremely loud

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13 Aune, 390.
14 Charles, 156. In Greco-Roman mythology, the sun god would have symbolized Apollo, with whom Roman Emperors, such as Nero, sometimes identified themselves. See Allen Kerkeslager, “Apollo, Greco-Roman Prophecy, and the Rider on the White Horse in Rev 6:2,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993): 118. Incidentally, Apollo, like the first horseman, carried a bow.
16 Mounce, 123. Mounce writes that these creatures “are related to the cherubim of Ezekiel 1,” although there are some differences in the descriptions of the creatures.
voice (14:2, 19:6); also, the voice of God is often compared to thunder.\textsuperscript{17} The loud voice coming from the living creatures “probably indicates the importance and solemnity their speech.”\textsuperscript{18} Some later manuscripts have the four living creatures (here and in vs. 3, 5, and 7) saying, “Come and see.” The best manuscripts omit these additional words, and the most logical conclusion for their addition by the Greek copyists is because they understood this to be a command given to John, to come and behold the events accompanying the breaking of the seals.\textsuperscript{19} This is an unnatural reading. John is not given the command to either “come” (ἐρχοµαι) or “come and see” (ἐρχοµαι καὶ ἰδε or ἐρχοµαι καὶ βλεπε) anywhere else in Revelation.\textsuperscript{20} The reason for the addition appears to be an intentional avoidance of the theological difficulty that seems to arise when one considers the four horsemen are sent on their mission as the result of divine command.\textsuperscript{21} Surely, assumed the copyist, God cannot be the One responsible for these plagues being launched upon the earth. Similar editing of the original text also takes place at the end of chapter 6, in verse 17, where the words “wrath of the Lamb” have been removed, on the theory that this is inconsistent with the character of the Lamb in the remainder of the book.\textsuperscript{22} The error, however, comes from those who have changed the wording of the original text. Indeed, as Hanson observes, “the concept of the wrath of God is more prominent in the Book of Revelation than in any other part of the New Testament.”\textsuperscript{23} Any conclusion to the contrary for chapter 6 plainly ignores the OT background of the passage found in the book of Zechariah, where four similar creatures are described as the ones “whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth” (Zech 1:10). In Zechariah, four chariots pulled by the four horses “patrol the

\textsuperscript{17} Aune, 393. For passages where the voice of God is compared with thunder, Aune lists 2 Sam 22:14, Job 37:2-5, Ps 18:13, Ps 29:3-9, Isa 29:6, Isa 30:30-31, Jer 25:30, and Amos 1:2.
\textsuperscript{18} David E. Aune, Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 282.
\textsuperscript{19} George Eldon Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 96.
\textsuperscript{20} Beale, 375.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 169.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 159.
earth as instruments of God’s wrath upon the enemies of his people.”

As the imagery in both Zechariah and Revelation share similarities, so do the missions. Hence, the four horses and riders in Rev 6 ride forth on the earth “as instruments of the divine purpose.” The command to “come,” therefore, is not directed at John; the four living creatures are, in succession, summoning the four riders. Each of the four living creatures is reacting to the breaking of the seals. As each of the first four seals is broken, an angelic creature, responding to the divine initiative given by the Lamb, summons a rider and sends him forth on his mission. Thus, the call to “come,” even though it summons the horses and riders, is really a call for Christ Himself to come. The passage indicates that the disasters that occur throughout the world, both natural and political, are actually caused by Christ, “in order to judge unbelievers who persecute Christians and in order to vindicate his people.”

The Lamb of God is the One in control of the destiny of the world; He is the One pouring out His wrath upon the world. The four riders that follow can thus be seen as carrying out the purposes of the Sovereign God.

The breaking of the seals also seems to symbolize the Jewish concept of the “Messianic woes.” In Jewish thought, these were signs of the impending destruction of the present world that would precede the coming of the Messiah. This idea, prevalent throughout most Jewish apocalyptic literature, includes the intensification of wars and natural disasters that intensify human suffering during this time. This would be a time of judgment for Israel and the whole world

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24 Ladd, 96.
27 Henry Barclay Swete, Commentary on Revelation (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 85. Swete compares the uses of ερχεσθαι throughout Revelation and concludes the verb “is used of the comings of God or of Christ.” Swete lists the following passages in Revelation where this usage occurs: 1:4, 7, 8; 2:5, 16; 3:11; 4:8; 16:15; and 22:7, 12, 17, and 20.
28 Beale, 372.
30 Charles, 153.
31 Christopher Rowland, The Open Heaven (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 156.
“indicating ever increasing severity of judgement [sic] until the Messiah appears.”\textsuperscript{32} Because of this, the parallel with the Synoptic eschatological discourse begins to take shape. Jesus told His disciples, “These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.”\textsuperscript{33} John sees these images in his vision.

**Verse 2**

\textit{And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and the one sitting on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and so that he might conquer.}

It is relatively safe to say that the most difficult part of interpreting this passage from Rev 6 is found here in verse 2. While the symbolic representation of the last three horses is generally agreed upon, the identity of the first horse and rider is widely disputed.\textsuperscript{34} A correct understanding of this horse and rider is imperative in understanding the entire passage.

The earliest known explanation of the rider of the white horse comes from Irenaeus, who concludes that the rider is none other than Christ Himself.\textsuperscript{35} According to this view, the white horse represents the triumphant progress of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{36} Various reasons for the interpretation include the fact that the horse is white (which is considered a “holy” color), the horseman is wearing a crown, and he goes out conquering.\textsuperscript{37} Chilton appeals to similar passages in Rev 19:11-16 and Ps 45:3-5 to support this view, which show the Son of God as a victorious rider.\textsuperscript{38} Surprisingly, Chilton’s observations actually agree with those of Zane Hodges, who appeals to the same passages to identify the horseman as Christ.\textsuperscript{39} However, this interpretation fails on several counts. First, Christ is the One opening the seals of the scroll; it is difficult (but admittedly, not impossible) to think of Him opening the first scroll, having the first living creature call Him, appearing on the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{32} Rogers and Rogers, 626.
\bibitem{33} Mk 13:8, NASB.
\bibitem{34} Ladd, 96-7.
\bibitem{36} Mounce, 141.
\bibitem{37} Wong, 215.
\bibitem{38} David Chilton, \textit{The Days of Vengeance} (Ft. Worth: Dominion, 1987), 186.
\end{thebibliography}
horse, riding forth, and then returning to open the remaining seals.\(^{40}\) Also, as Swete acknowledges, “the two riders [in Rev 6 and Rev 19] have nothing in common beyond the white horse.”\(^{41}\) An analysis of both passages shows this to be true. Both the rider and Christ wear crowns, but the rider actually wears a single στέφανος, whereas Christ wears many διαδήματα.\(^{42}\) While στέφανος can be translated as a crown, it is better thought of as a symbol of victory (instead of royalty, as is the case for διαδήμα).\(^{43}\) Hence, a better translation might be *victory wreath* or *victory prize*. This fits well with the conquering rider. Elsewhere, in Rev 2:10, John uses στέφανος to as *crown of life*.\(^{44}\) Hemer observes that in Revelation a strict distinction is applied between στέφανος as a symbol of victory and διαδήμα as a symbol of royalty,\(^{45}\) although Robertson claims that it is not certain if this was always observed in koine Greek.\(^{46}\) It should also be noted that Christ, as the Son of Man, is described as wearing a στέφανος in Rev 14:14.\(^{47}\) Therefore an absolute distinction of terms cannot be too strongly stressed here. John may have been using variety in his use of terms here, but identification of the rider with Christ seems extremely unlikely. What cannot be overlooked is that the victory wreath is *given* (ἐδοθη, *it was given*, aorist passive) to the rider, but the position of Christ, as the worthy Lamb, is one of authority, manifested in the opening of the seals.\(^{48}\) Thus, it is difficult to conceive of the first rider as possessing the διαδήμα of Jesus Christ.

A further examination of verse two also demonstrates the unlikelihood of the first rider being Christ. In Rev 19, Christ carries a sword, but here the rider is equipped with a bow. As the

\(^{40}\) This difficulty is suggested in Beale, 376 and Ladd, 97. It is also suggested in Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen: Kok, 1965), 189.

\(^{41}\) Swete, 86.

\(^{42}\) Wong, 217.

\(^{43}\) Verlyn Verbrugge, ed., *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1195. A στέφανος was often awarded as the prize in an athletic contest.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 72.


\(^{47}\) Kerkeslager, 117.

\(^{48}\) Vos, 189. Cf. Wong, 221.
crown is best interpreted as a symbol of victory, the bow can be interpreted as a symbol of military power.\textsuperscript{49} Also, if the rider of the second horse carries a sword, as does Christ in Rev 19, why not compare him to the Savior as well?\textsuperscript{50} Likewise, the color of the horse itself can be interpreted as a symbol of victory.\textsuperscript{51} Together, all of these symbols emphasize the nature of the rider and his mission. He goes out to conquer, and he is victorious in his mission. The imagery from which John draws almost undoubtedly comes from the Parthian cavalry, whose riders were famous as archers and favored white horses; the Parthians had also won a victory over the Roman army in 62 A.D.\textsuperscript{52} When one considers the victory motif in the verse, the Parthian imagery is extremely likely. The victorious Parthian would be distinguished from the victorious Roman, since victorious Roman generals did not ride white horses, but were “generally seated in a four-horse cart.”\textsuperscript{53} As far as the vague similarities between Christ and the rider, this is almost certainly intentional on the part of John. Because of the resemblance between the two, and because of the parallelism of this passage and previously mentioned Synoptic discourses, it can be deduced that the first rider possesses a counterfeit nature. The white horse, the crown, and the bow, while all being symbols of victory, may very well used to emphasize the first rider as a false messiah, with the conquering referring “to the triumphant progress of the deception of false messiahs.”\textsuperscript{54} Jesus warned His disciples to beware of false messiahs who would mislead many (Mt 24:4-5; Mk 13:5-6; Lk 8). Jesus predicted that not only would these false messiahs come, but also they would be successful in their deceptive campaign.\textsuperscript{55} False teaching was apparently prevalent during the time of the writing of Revelation.

\textsuperscript{49} Mounce, 142.
\textsuperscript{50} Jesus did say, in Mt 10, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Actually the swords mentioned in Rev 6:4 and Rev 19:15 are different words in Greek: the second rider carries a µαχαιρα, but Christ carries a ρομφαια. The sword is better seen as a symbol of authority given by God to the rider, since only emperors and high military officials would normally wear or carry swords. See Aune, \textit{Revelation}, 396.
\textsuperscript{51} Swete, 86.
\textsuperscript{52} Mounce, 142.
\textsuperscript{53} Ladd, 97.
\textsuperscript{54} Kerkeslager, 117-8.
\textsuperscript{55} Vos, 191.
As Carson notes, “five of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 warn about deception in the church, and suggest that if the members do not turn from the dangerous course ahead of them their church will be destroyed….” The enemies of God, those who oppose His Gospel and His people, will allow themselves to be deceived in following false teachers and false messiahs.

**Verses 3 and 4**

*And when He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.” And another horse, fiery-red, came out, and to the one sitting on it, it was given to him to take the peace from the land, and that they will slaughter one another, and a great sword was given to him.*

The breaking of the second seal in verse three occurs in the same fashion as the breaking of the first. The Lamb breaks the seal, and the second living creature calls for the second horse and rider. Because many commentators do not view the first rider as representing false messiahs, the interpretation of the second rider is often confused. Charles says the first horseman represents war and the second represents international strife. Mounce takes a similar approach, stating that the second rider represents “anarchy and bloodshed.” However, such an approach appears redundant. It seems unlikely that both of the first horsemen would have such similar goals. Using the mythological parallel suggested by Charles (see page 3 of this report), it appears more appropriate to conclude that the second horseman represents war. Rissi comments that the color is the same as the color of the dragon in Rev 12:3. The color of the horse, however, probably has more to do with the imagery from Zechariah than any alleged similarity with the dragon. Beckwith concludes that “the second rider, as shown by the sword, the color of his horse, and the mission to take peace from the earth, symbolizes war, or more precisely, the slaughter of war.” It may better to interpret

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57 Charles, 160.
58 Mounce, 143. Interestingly, Mounce uses the period of 68-69 A.D. as an example of civil unrest within the Roman Empire.
59 Rissi, 409, n.
the symbolism of this rider to include both war as well as civil and international strife.\textsuperscript{61} In the Jesus’ eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels, He warns His disciples that they would “be hearing of wars and rumors of wars …for nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.”\textsuperscript{62} Note that the power of the second rider, like the first, is limited. The One breaking the seals has given both the sword and the power to remove peace to him.

\textbf{Verses 5 and 6}

\textit{And when He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and the one sitting on it had scales in his hand. And I heard as a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of grain per denarius, and three quarts of barley per denarius; and do not hurt the oil and the wine.”}

The scene of the breaking of the seals is again repeated, with the third living creature calling for the third horseman. This time, John sees a black horse, and the rider has scales instead of a weapon. This image is probably the easiest to understand in the passage. The rider carries scales, presumably to weigh food, which is “a prophetic announcement of famine.”\textsuperscript{63} The pair of scales, the symbol of famine here, is an image from Ezek 4:10.\textsuperscript{64} The horse is black, the color of mourning, which is a result of famine.\textsuperscript{65} The voice in the midst of the creatures is most likely Christ Himself, since He is mentioned as being in the midst of the four living creatures in Rev 5:6.\textsuperscript{66} Even if the voice is not Christ’s, Aune notes that such unidentified voices in Revelation “have complete divine authority and approval and are ultimately to be identified with God himself.”\textsuperscript{67} The statement concludes positively that this rider represents famine. A quart of grain (or wheat), which could sustain a single person for one day, costs one danarius, equivalent to one day’s wages; three quarts

\textsuperscript{62} Mt 24:6-7. Cf. Mk 13:7-8; Lk 21:9-10
\textsuperscript{63} Rissi, 409.
\textsuperscript{64} Chilton, 189.
\textsuperscript{65} Considine, 415.
\textsuperscript{66} Beale, 381.
\textsuperscript{67} Aune, Prophecy, 283.
of barley would last three days. According to Mounce, this price is “ten to twelve times what it should have been.” Famine, one of the signs mentioned in Jesus’ eschatological discourse, in turn, brings about economic hardship on those it affects.

The comment concerning the wine and oil seems a bit stranger. Wheat and barley were considered to be the most important crops in Palestine, with wine and oil of secondary importance, and this hierarchy would probably have been similar in Asia Minor. Hemer has used the statement as proof to argue for a dating of Revelation during the reign of Domitian, since the emperor issued an edict restricting the growing of vines in Asia Minor in 92 A.D. This conclusion seems more than a little forced. First, only wine is mentioned in Domitian’s edict. Secondly, and more obviously, the wine and oil are not to be harmed. Agriculturally, this would make sense, since wine and oil have deeper root systems than wheat and barley, allowing them to better survive the drought conditions which would precipitate famine. The famine conditions actually show signs of restraint from God, with food being scarce but not totally destroyed, and the less important crops being virtually unaffected. Once again, the opening of this seal follows the pattern in Jesus’ eschatological discourse, where He warned His disciples of famines.

**Verses 7 and 8**

And when He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a green horse, and the one sitting on it, his name was Death, and Hades was following after him, and authority was given to them over a fourth of the land, to kill with sword and with hunger and with death by the wild beasts of the land.

After the fourth seal is broken and the fourth living creature summons the fourth horse and rider, the most unusual of the horses, at least in color, appears. Usually the horse is described as

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68 Ibid. Cf. Mt 20:2 for the value of a denarius during the first century A.D.
69 Mounce, 144. Others arrive at different comparisons, but all agree this is a highly inflated amount.
70 Rissi, 409.
71 Hemer, 4.
72 Mounce, 144.
73 Mt 24:7; Mk 13:8; Lk 21:11
pale, but the color is actually \( \chiλωροζ \), which is usually translated green or yellowish-green. In the New Testament, \( \chiλωροζ \) is always rendered green, except here.\(^{74}\) It is used elsewhere in Revelation (8:7; 9:4) to describe vegetation.\(^{75}\) This color differs from the colors of the horses in Zech 6, where the fourth horse is described as grizzled or dappled.\(^{76}\) Apparently, the reluctance to translate \( \chiλωροζ \) as green is because such a horse does not occur in nature.\(^{77}\) Actually, it can be argued that such a horse does occur in nature: in death.\(^{78}\) Furthermore, the use of green as the color of the last horse fits in well with the imagery of the seven seals. Chilton has noted the following parallelism between the colors involved in the seals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Seal: White horse</th>
<th>Fifth Seal: White robes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Second Seal: Red horse</td>
<td>Sixth Seal: Moon like blood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Seal: Black horse</td>
<td>Sun black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Seal: Green horse</td>
<td>Seventh Seal: Green grass burned(^{79})</td>
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This explains the slight difference in the order and color of the horses in Rev 6 and Zech 6. The green color also fits well with the last rider, who is the personification of death. Hades, the realm of the dead, should probably not be viewed as a second rider accompanying death on the green horse.

In the LXX, Death and Hades (\( \thetaανατοζ \) and \( αδης \)) are used in combination “almost synonymously in reference to the region of the dead.”\(^{80}\) Thus, the two are most likely a single, collective entity.

It is interesting to note John’s usage of \( \gammaηζ \) here (and elsewhere) in Revelation. One would expect the text to indicate the wrath of God is being poured upon the world (\( \kappaοσμοζ \)) instead of the land (or earth). In the Gospel of John, \( \kappaοσμοζ \) “almost always denotes the world of humans, esp.

\(^{75}\) Mounce, 145, n.
\(^{77}\) Ibid., 216. Cf. Chilton, 191, n. Chilton writes, “Translators have usually rendered it as pale, apparently under the firm conviction that, since there is no such thing as green horse, St. John could not have possibly seen one.” Peachey asks, rightly so, “As these horses …were seen in visions, why should they not be green, pink, purple or any other colour?”
\(^{78}\) Peachey, 215. Peachey writes, “When horse meat …putrefies it acquire a distinct greenish tinge, and to that extent green is certainly a color associated with death.”
\(^{79}\) Chilton, 195.
\(^{80}\) Beale, 382.
[sic] the world of sinful humanity that opposes God, resists the redeeming work of the Son, does not believe in him, and indeed hates him."81 In contrast, γη can have a different nuance in meaning.

According to Verbrugge:

It is frequently difficult to decide whether a passage is speaking of a particular country (esp. [sic] the land of Israel) or of the populated earth as a whole. …With our modern view of the world we are inclined to think globally and universally. However, the NT can use “the earth” in a particularistic way to refer to (lit.) “all the tribes of the land” [e.g. Rev 1:7].82

Rev 7:1 uses γης twice to refer to “the four angels standing at the corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth.” This obviously reflects the language of Zech 1:10-11 and Zech 6:5,7, where the four spirits patrol the earth. The LXX for Zechariah uses a form a γη in these passages.83 However, the same Greek word is used by the prophet in Zech 12:10-14, where it refers to Israel.84 If a “tribes of the land” (instead of a “tribes of the earth”) translation is accepted for Rev 1:7, which quotes the Zech 12 passage, then it is not unreasonable to conclude that in Rev 6, these Messianic woes are to be poured out upon a fourth of the same land, i.e. Israel. This fits well with the context of Rev 6, especially when one considers the passage parallels the Lord’s eschatological discourse from the Synoptic Gospels. If it can be agreed that Jesus’ discourse refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., then Rev 6 should likewise be considered. As Chilton observes, “While all readily admit that the Little Apocalypse is a prophecy against Israel, … few seem able to make the obvious connection: The Big Apocalypse is a prophecy against Israel as well!”85 To conclude otherwise seems to overlook the plain meaning of the text.

At first glance, it is unclear to whom the power is given over a fourth of the land to kill by sword (ροµθαια), by hunger (λιµω), by death (θανατω), and by wild beasts (θηριων). It could be

81 Verbrugge, 708.
82 Ibid., 248.
84 Ibid.
85 Chilton, 182-3.
given to the final rider(s), or the verse may be a summary of the deadly effect of all the previous riders. Rissi, for example, claims that the power is given to Death and Hades, since this interpretation is more correct syntactically and it fits well with the death-like color of the final horse. However, a plural pronoun, \( \alphaυτοις \) \((to them)\), is used in the verse. Hence, either antecedent could be considered correct. Aune argues that “although four plagues are included in this summary of the activity of the four cavaliers, it is not possible to correlate each plague with a particular cavalier.” This is not entirely correct. The fractional representation of their power is an indication of “the limitations placed upon their murderous activity.” The first two effects seem to summarize the destruction brought by the second and third horsemen. Little should be made of the fact that the second horseman wields a \( \muαχαιρα \) instead of a \( ροµθαια \), as the terms are frequently used synonymously, especially in the LXX. Also, John is fond of using synonymous terminology. The third plague mentioned in the verse, \( \thetaανατω \) \((death, although it is usually translated as disease or pestilence)\), obviously parallels the fourth rider, \( \Thetaανατος \). What about the fourth plague? Rev 6:8 is parallel to Ezek 14:21, which mentions the “four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague.” In Rev 6:8, \( wild \) \( beasts \) is translated from \( \thetaηριων \), the plural of \( \thetaηριον \). The singular form of this Greek word occurs frequently later in Revelation, as \( the \) \( Beast \). There is no shortage of commentators, especially dispensationalists, who equate the first rider with this dastardly figure, deemed to be the Antichrist. While the present writer does not believe the first rider to be the personification of a specific historical man, the view

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86 Rissi, 410.
87 Aune, Revelation, 402; \( \alphaυτοις \) is a dative pronoun and can be either masculine or neuter.
88 Ibid.
89 Mounce, 145.
90 Ibid.
91 Carson, 51.
92 Some exclude the first horseman from the plagues because he has ridden off and was never “called back.” See Considine, 419-20.
94 E.g. see Wong, 222-6.
of the first rider as a type of beast who misleads does seem to complement the Johannine understanding of the spirit of antichrist, false teachers, many of whom existed in John’s day (1 Jn 2:22; 4:3; 2 Jn 7). This fits well with the context of the destructive missions of the horsemen, and it seems to be a fulfillment of God’s judgment against Israel in Ezek 14 (and the Synoptic discourses).

**Conclusion to Paper**

Rev 6:1-8 is key to understanding much of the book of Revelation. In the past, it has met both with careful analysis and endless speculation, but the former will prevail if it is done within the context of all of Scripture. In following the arguments of Charles, Vos, and others, it becomes quite obvious that chapter six of Revelation parallels the eschatological discourse of Jesus. This is hardly even questioned by most serious commentators. Since most would agree Jesus was speaking of Jerusalem, then why treat chapter six of Revelation differently? The four horsemen represent four powers ordained by God and poured upon those who had rejected His Messiah. When Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D., this was the fulfillment of His wrath. Yet, in a sense, the four horsemen may very well continue to ride. Whenever the enemies of God deny Him and follow false teaching and false saviors, the approach of the horsemen is unmistakable. The rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and with it the Christian worldview, can be seen in its devastating results: war, hunger, and all manner of death, be it at the hands of men or nature. These things are the byproduct of sin. These plagues followed Adam’s first sin, and they continue today with those who reject the commands of God. It is only the Lamb, the only One worthy to break the seals and open the scroll, who is able to save. The destruction of Jerusalem serves to warn that apart from Christ, the only alternative is to suffer the wrath of God and be crushed by the stampede of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

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95 A chart detailing many of these parallels appears in the appendix to this paper.
96 A possible answer to this might be due to the dating of Revelation after the destruction of Jerusalem. The unlikelihood of such a dating is discussed in the appendix.
Appendix I: Translation

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying like the sound of thunder, “Come.”

2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and the one sitting on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and so that he might conquer.

3 And when He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.”

4 And another horse, fiery-red, came out, and to the one sitting on it, it was given to him to take the peace from the land, and that they will slaughter one another, and a great sword was given to him.

5 And when He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and the one sitting on it had scales in his hand.

6 And I heard as a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of grain per denarius, and three quarts of barley per denarius; and do not hurt the oil and the wine.”

7 And when He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.”

8 And I looked, and behold, a green horse, and the one sitting on it, his name was Death, and Hades was following after him, and authority was given to them over a fourth of the land, to kill with sword and with hunger and with death by the wild beasts of the land.

Textual Variations

Nearly every verse in this passage possesses a possible variant. However, most of these consist of later additions to the text by copyists. The use of ερχοµαι και ιδε or ερχοµαι και βλεπε (come and see) in verses 1, 3, 5, and 7 has already been dealt with in this paper. Also, και ειδον in verses 5 and 8 is sometimes replaced with και εξηλθε (and I went), which reflects the same interpretation problem on the part of the copyists. Other variations are of no major significance. Some manuscripts add και ηκουσα to verse 2, making it read and I heard and I saw, which is completely irrelevant. A preposition variation occurs in some manuscripts in verse 4

(απο or επι or the elimination of εκ). A similar word choice difference is sometimes found in verse 8 (επανω or επ αυτον instead of επανω αυτου). Once again, the difference is relatively insignificant. The second horseman still has the power to take peace from the land (or to take away peace in the land/on the earth), and the fourth horse still has a rider.

**Paraphrase**

The Lamb of God, Christ Himself, had in His hand the scroll with the seven seals. He broke one of the seals, and I heard a voice. One of the great angelic beings uttered a single word in a voice as loud as thunder: “Come.” Then I saw a white horse come forth. On the horse was a rider with a bow in one hand and a victory wreath on his head. His mission was to conquer, and that’s exactly what he rode out to do. Then the Lamb of God opened the second seal on the scroll, and I heard a second angelic being repeat the solitary word, “Come.” And a second horse was summoned, this one the color of fire, and its rider had been given the power to take peace from the land, so that men would violently kill each other. In his hand he had a great sword. Then the Lamb of God opened the third seal, and the third angelic being uttered the word, “Come.” This time a black horse came forth, and its rider had a set of scales in his hand. I heard a voice coming from the midst of the four angels. It said, “If you want a quart of wheat, it’ll cost you an entire days wages. You’ll have to work three days just to buy one quart of barley. And be careful; make sure no harm comes to the oil or the wine.” Then the Lamb of God opened the fourth seal, and the fourth angelic being repeated the awesome word, “Come.” I saw another horse, this one green, the color of death and rotting flesh, and the rider of the horse was none other than Death! He had Hades with him, and they had the power over a quarter of the land to bring death, either by the sword, or by famine, or even by wild beasts.
Appendix II: Introduction to the Book of Revelation

**Literary Genre**

The book of Revelation belongs to a genre of literature that is typically referred to as apocalyptic. To be technical, Revelation can be classified as three different styles of literature: apocalypse (or *revelation*), prophecy, and epistle. However, it is the apocalyptic nature of Revelation that sets it apart from the remainder of the NT. Therefore, this introduction will be concerned with the discussion of this particular genre.

Apocalyptic literature was a prevalent form of Jewish literature in the period from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. Although attempts have been made to determine the source and influence of these writings, they are generally understood to be uniquely Jewish in nature. The apocalypse is related to prophecy in that both are concerned with a future coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the kingdom of God. In contrast to most prophecy, however, the apocalypse is concerned with eschatological hope. Prophecy looks for the salvation of God to be brought into the present world through the use of processes in the world; the apocalypse looks for God to break through and establish a new world. The apocalypse looks forward to the “last things,” a time in the future when God will return to judge the righteous and the wicked. However, the book of Revelation goes beyond this limitation. It is written during a time of persecution for Christians with the purpose of showing that God is control of all things. He is not simply idle, impotently awaiting the final culmination of the events of history. Instead, He is the

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99 Mounce, 1.
100 Mounce, 2.
101 Beckwith, 167.
102 Ibid.
103 Carson, Moo, and Morris, 478.
author of that history. Feuillet calls Revelation “the only book in the New Testament collection
dedicated entirely to the task of explaining the Christian meaning of history.”\textsuperscript{104} The God who
created all things is sovereign over all things, and He will bring the just conclusion of all things,
according to His good will.

The most distinguishing feature of the apocalypse is “the highly elaborate vision.”\textsuperscript{105} This
revelation generally takes the form of an “otherworldly journey.”\textsuperscript{106} Thus, apocalyptic literature
features a large amount of symbolism. This symbolism plays a major part in the genre.\textsuperscript{107}

Apocalyptic literature will consist of numerous images that need to be interpreted. In the case of the
book of Revelation, many of these images have been borrowed from other sources. As a rule,
apocalyptic literature makes frequent use allusions, usually to some form of traditional imagery.\textsuperscript{108}

Revelation borrows more heavily from the OT than any other NT book.\textsuperscript{109} There are also allusions
to Near Eastern mythology.\textsuperscript{110} In understanding Revelation, it is important to be aware of this
apocalyptic background. It cannot be correctly read and understood apart from referring to its
background sources.

\textit{Author}

In general, apocalyptic literature is pseudonymous.\textsuperscript{111} Revelation is different in this
respect.\textsuperscript{112} At the beginning of the book of Revelation the author describes himself simply as “John”
(1:1, 4, 9). From the second century, early Christian testimony has understood the author to be the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[104] Feuillet, 131.
\item[105] Ibid., 169.
\item[107] Mounce, 4.
\item[108] Collins, 14.
\item[109] Carson, Moo, and Morris, 477.
\item[110] Collins, 15. The use of allusions from pagan mythology is a common feature of apocalyptic literature.
\item[111] Beckwith, 172. The authorship of an apocalyptic book is generally ascribed to some noteworthy person of antiquity
(e.g. Moses, Enoch, Isaiah, etc.).
\item[112] For a discussion on the unlikelihood of Revelation being pseudonymous, see Charles, xxxviii-xxxix.
\end{footnotes}
Apostle John. Mounce declares that “early tradition is unanimous in its opinion that the Apocalypse was written by John the apostle.” Christian writers in the second century, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, as well as third-century fathers such as Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen all ascribe authorship to the Apostle, and “they do so without any hint of there being a contrary claim.” John wrote as a person in authority within the Christian community (i.e., as an apostle), and the fact that he did not describe himself in fuller detail is because “apparently it could be assumed that there could be no possibility of mistaken identity.” No other book in the New Testament can lay claim to a stronger or earlier tradition with regard to its authorship than Revelation.

Tradition, however, is a fickle creature, and basing one’s opinion solely on it can be misleading. Despite strong testimony to the contrary, however, many dispute the Apostle John’s authorship. Wilson, for example, emphatically declares that virtually no modern scholar believes that the same person wrote Revelation and the Gospel attributed to the Apostle. Originally, rejection of the apostolic authorship of Revelation seems to have begun in the second century with Marcion. While this heretic is not to be taken seriously, a more formidable challenge to the authorship arose in the third century from Dionysius, a bishop from Alexandria, and his objections have been influential upon many modern scholars. However, it should be noted that Dionysius’ arguments were not based primarily on evidence or tradition, but were driven by a theological bias (his rejection of premillennialism). The main objection to apostolic authorship seems to be the

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113 Carson, Moo, and Morris, 468.
114 Mounce, 11.
115 Carson, Moo, and Morris, 468.
116 Mounce, 8.
117 Carson, Moo, and Morris, 468.
119 Mounce, 12.
120 Carson, Moo, and Morris, 468.
121 Ibid., 468-9.
supposed differences between Revelation and the fourth Gospel, both in theology and style.\textsuperscript{122} Adela Yarbro Collins demonstrates the perpetual influence of Dionysius on current biblical scholarship when she claims that “few scholars today believe the gospel and Revelation were written by the same person because of their linguistic and theological differences.”\textsuperscript{123} None of these objections is very credible. The Gospel and the Apocalypse are obviously different literary genres, and they will thus contain many differences in the way they are written. However, in their haste to deny apostolic authorship, critics often overlook the similarities between the two books. For example, both “teach that God is both loving and judging, that Christ is both redeemer and sovereign Lord, and that ‘the last things’ have both been realized in Jesus’ death and resurrection …and await the end of history for their consummation…. There is no reason on [theological] grounds to think the same person could not have written both [books].”\textsuperscript{124} As far as stylistic similarities, several expressions appear in the Gospel and Revelation that are common only to those books in the New Testament and are not used in the same way by any other New Testament writer; in addition, both books make similar use of numerical symbolism.\textsuperscript{125} Robertson comments that “there are numerous coincidences in vocabulary and style between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse.”\textsuperscript{126} Mounce concurs, noting that certain words used throughout Johannine writings have the same specialized meaning.\textsuperscript{127} The testimony of both internal evidence and early Christian tradition make a strong case for attributing the authorship of Revelation to the Apostle John.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 470.
\textsuperscript{124} Carson, Moo, and Morris, 470.
\textsuperscript{125} Chilton, 1-2; As examples, Chilton states that words such as \textit{Lamb of God}, \textit{Word}, and \textit{witness} are used in a unique way by John. In addition, both the Gospel and Revelation are arranged in series of “sevens.”
\textsuperscript{126} Robertson, 274.
\textsuperscript{127} Mounce, 14. Mounce notes that “\textit{logos} is used in a personal sense in Rev 19:13 and elsewhere in the NT only in John 1:1, 14 and 1 John 1:1 in the same way.”
Date

It is well known that the current majority report for the dating of the book of Revelation places the writing circa 95-96 A.D., during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian. Beale, for example, writes that “the consensus among twentieth-century scholars is that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian around 95 A.D.”128 For support, Swete notes that “early Christian tradition is almost unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian.”129 Feuillet concurs, claiming that “the traditional setting of the Apocalypse in the reign of Domitian is too solidly established to be brought into question.”130 While the subject of dating the book of Revelation is a complex topic and far too lengthy to engage here in a detailed discussion, it is important to establish the most probable dating, since this will influence the interpretation of the book. It will be argued that the most likely dating for the book of Revelation is about 68 A.D., during (or possibly just after) the reign of Nero, and prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Prior to the twentieth century, most New Testament scholars favored a pre-70 A.D. dating for Revelation; that view changed with the publication of three profoundly influential scholarly commentaries on the book of Revelation in the early twentieth century.131 All three commentators relied heavily (and uncritically) upon the work of J.B. Lightfoot to establish a framework of Domitian persecution and emperor worship for dating Revelation during the reign of the emperor.132 However, there is no concrete historical evidence for the persecution of Christians under Domitian. Even though the emperor was despised by most first- and second-century Roman historians, none

128 Beale, 4.
131 Wilson, 587-8. The authors of the three commentaries were R.H. Charles, H.B. Swete, and I.T. Beckwith.
132 Ibid., 588. Lightfoot, interestingly, was in the nineteenth-century majority and favored a pre-70 date for Revelation.
“gives so much as a hint that he persecuted Christians.”[^133] The biographer Suetonius, who specifically credits Nero with the persecution of Christians, never makes the same charge against Domitian.[^134] Although persecutions almost certainly took place during the reign of this emperor, none can be said to be specifically Christian in nature. Much has been made of the execution of Domitian’s cousin Flavius Clemens and the exile of Flavius’ wife on charges of atheism (which would indicate that they did not acknowledge the emperor as deity); however, the source for this statement is highly questionable, and it nowhere indicates that their “atheism” existed because of a prior conversion to Christianity.[^135] Domitian, it seems, was far more concerned with ridding himself of perceived political rivals that persecuting Christians because of their faith. In fact, Suetonius, who praised Nero for his persecution of Christians, never mentions Christian persecution under Domitian.[^136] Even late date advocates admit that “many scholars have exaggerated the evidence for a persecution of Christians under Domitian.”[^137] Thus, the persecution of Christians, which seems to be frequently alluded to in the book of Revelation, cannot be shown to have actively taken place during the reign of Domitian. The historical evidence simply does not exist.

Another charge frequently leveled against Domitian (and in support of a late date for Revelation) is the institution of emperor worship under his reign. Domitian, however, did not institute this practice among the Roman emperors. In fact, it has been notoriously difficult to precisely date the growth of the emperor worship within the Roman Empire.[^138] Mounce admits that emperor worship existed under Julius Caesar, Augustus, Caligula and “by the time of Nero the

[^133]: Ibid., 589.
[^135]: Albert A. Bell, Jr., “The Date of John’s Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 25 (1978): 94. The source documenting Clemens’ “atheism” is from a statement by Cassius Dio, most of whose work has been lost, from manuscripts dated from the eleventh century or later; also, in the statement, Dio seems to equate the atheism with Judaism, not Christianity, casting further suspicion on a Domitian persecution. In addition, the historian Suetonius seems to indicate that it is far more likely that Clemens’ execution took place because his paranoid cousin suspected him capable of assassination. See Bell, 94-6. Cf. Wilson, 589-97.
[^136]: Yarbro Collins, 38.
[^137]: Carson, Moo, and Morris, 474. Cf. Mounce 18-9, Yarbro Collins, 38
imperial cult was firmly established as a religious institution.”\(^{139}\) Beale also agrees that Roman emperors exalted themselves as divine and required worship prior to Domitian.\(^{140}\) For example, the title “lord and god” is often credited to Domitian and cited as evidence of a late date for Revelation, but at least one emperor prior to Domitian (Augustus) and possibly another (Nero) used the same title.\(^{141}\) Temples erected for the purpose of emperor worship are known to have existed during Augustus’ reign as emperor.\(^{142}\) According to Mounce, “during his lifetime Augustus had allowed his eastern subjects to pay him divine honors, and at his death the Romans proclaimed him divus (one like the gods).”\(^{143}\) Caligula strongly encouraged the emperor cult.\(^{144}\) Nero even went so far as to equate himself with Apollo and accept worship (in Ephesus, no less) as “Almighty God” and “Savior.”\(^{145}\) Emperor worship was not unique to the reign of Domitian. There is considerable evidence to suggest that although Domitian may have accepted divine accolades, as did his predecessors, it is highly debated as to whether he actually encouraged the practice.\(^{146}\) Emperor worship was a practice regularly employed by Roman emperors; however, this practice does not in any way mandate a dating for Revelation during the reign of Domitian.

Without a doubt, the strongest piece of historical evidence for a late dating of Revelation comes from the testimony of Irenaeus.\(^{147}\) In his most famous work, *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)*, Irenaeus writes the following:

> We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it

\(^{139}\) Mounce, 17.
\(^{140}\) Beale, 5.
\(^{141}\) Floyd O. Parker, “‘Our Lord and God’ in Rev 4,11: Evidence for the Late Date of Revelation?” *Biblica* 82 (2001): 216.
\(^{142}\) Gentry, 264.
\(^{143}\) Mounce, 245.
\(^{144}\) Yarbaro Collins, 36.
\(^{146}\) Parker, 210-12.
\(^{147}\) Newman, 135.
would have been announced by him who beheld the Apocalypse. For it was seen not very long ago, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian’s reign.  

This passage does not exist without its problems. In the original Greek of the passage (rendered not by Irenaeus, but rather preserved by the fourth-century historian Eusebius), it is unclear as to the subject of the verb “was seen” (εωραθη); in Greek, the third person singular pronoun of the subject can be interpreted as either “it” or “he,” meaning that it was John who was seen during the reign of Domitian.  

Thus, the testimony of Irenaeus is questionable at best, especially when it is observed that this historical interpretation goes against that of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch, second-century Roman historians whose writings confirm that the date should be attributed to June of 68 A.D., the tumultuous period immediately after the death of Nero.  

In addition, many late date advocates who rely on the testimony of Irenaeus virtually ignore other early Christian writers who opt for an earlier date. Furthermore, the acceptance of Irenaeus’ testimony by late date advocates actually weakens the other cases for external evidence, since Irenaeus never even suggests a persecution under Domitian, neither for John nor any other Christian. In any event, none of these historical sources are infallible. Although they are helpful, none should be taken as ironclad proof of the date of Revelation, since they are open to error as well as different interpretation.

The best source for dating the book of Revelation is the book of Revelation itself. Schaff notes that “the internal evidence strongly favors an earlier date between the death of Nero (June 9, 68) and the destruction of Jerusalem (August 10, 70).” One of the most important passages in

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149 Gentry, 45-57. It has also been noted that Irenaeus may have actually been referring to Nero in the passage instead of Domitian, since Δοµετιανου does not contain a definite article and may thus be translated as an adjective. Nero’s name, incidentally, was Domitius Nero. See Gentry, 48-9, n.
150 Bell, 93. Syriac versions of Revelation also support dating during the reign of Nero. See Wilson, 598 and Swete, c.
151 Gentry, The Beast of Revelation, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 189-99. These writers would include Papias, Tertullian, and Epiphanius. Other early Christian documents, such as the Muratorian Canon and, possibly, the Shepherd of Hermas suggest an early dating.
dating the book is found in Rev 13.154 Most scholars, even those who favor a dating during Domitian’s reign, agree that the beast of Rev 13 is Nero.155 This would seem to suggest that Revelation was written prior to 70 A.D., since the beast is seemingly active as the vision of John unfolds.156 Late date advocates are usually able to explain away this identification by appealing to the *Nero redivivus* myth, which held that Nero would rise from the dead and return to rule the Roman Empire.157 The contention is that this “resurrected Nero” was Domitian.158 Yet, no writing of the first century ever identified the *Nero redivivus* with Domitian.159 False Neros did arise within the Roman Empire, in 69, 79, and 88 A.D., but according Tacitus, the only one of these who made any noticeable impact was the first.160 If this myth existed, it would have been realized in these attempted coups. There is no evidence linking the myth to Domitian. If Nero were, in fact, the beast of Revelation, this would seem to favor an earlier dating for the book.

If Rev 13 indicates the possibility of an early date for Revelation, the internal evidence from Rev 17:9-11 is even stronger. Wilson considers this passage to be “the most important internal passage for dating Revelation.”161 The verses read as follows:

> Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are the seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.162

The passage clearly states that the seven heads are seven kings (or emperors). The following is the full list of Roman emperors to the time of Domitian: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberias, Gaius (Caligula), Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitelius, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. There is a

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154 Wilson, 598-9.
155 Wilson, 598. Cf. Mounce, 262; Beckwith, 642; Bell, 98; Chilton, 344-52; etc. Also see Gentry, Beast, 37-47.
156 Beale, 24.
157 Ibid., 17.
158 Wilson, 598.
159 Ibid., 599.
160 Bell, 98.
161 Wilson, 599. Cf. Bell, 97.
162 NASB
disagreement among the Roman historians as to whether one should begin the list with Julius (as does Suetonius) or Augustus (as does Tacitus). In enumerating the emperors, then, Wilson describes the only two historically realistic alternatives:

Start, as Tacitus does, with Augustus. The last of the five who “have fallen” would be Nero. The one who “is” would be Galba. ...Revelation would thus have been written during the reign of Galba, June 68 to January 69. Nero has the mortal wound, but the rumours are already circulating that he may actually not be dead, that he may come back. Start, as does Suetonius, ... with Julius. The last of the five who “have fallen” would be Claudius. Nero would be the one who “is.” Revelation would have thus been written in the latter years of the reign of Nero, after the persecution of Christians in 64-5, but before Nero’s suicide in 68. In either case Revelation was written before 70.

Late date advocates often go through all manner of disingenuous historical distortions to get around this logical historical ordering of emperors. Either they begin with an emperor other than Julius or Augustus, or they omit the reigns of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius (and sometimes others as well!) to arrive at Domitian. Some, such as Beale, ignore the historical problem by allegorizing the text. However, if one treats history fairly and examines the internal evidence of Revelation, then the text itself almost begs for a dating during the reign of Nero (or shortly thereafter). Schaff calls this “the natural interpretation of [Rev] 17:10.” The only historically verifiable circumstances to which the vision of John alludes took place during his reign. Persecution of Christians under Nero is an historical fact, whereas a Domitian persecution of Christians is untenable. Beale even admits that

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163 Wilson, 600.
164 Wilson, 603-4.
165 Bell, 99. Bell writes, “The objection is usually raised that Galba, Otho and Vitellius each ruled for such a short time that they can and should be easily overlooked. But an ancient writer could no more have omitted them from his list of emperors than a modern American historian could omit William Henry Harrison, the ninth president, who caught pneumonia at his inauguration in 1841 and died a month later. His influence on the course of American history was absolutely nil, but he was duly elected and inaugurated and therefore must be reckoned in any accurate listing of men who have held that office. The same principle applies to Galba, Otho and Vitellius.” It is notable that Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius view these three men as emperors, and no ancient historian or writer omits them from lists of emperors. See Wilson, 601-2 and Bell, 99.
166 Beale, 24. Beale states that “it is possible that seven specific emperors were originally in mind and that they were symbolic for all evil kingdoms throughout history.”
168 Bell, 102.
169 Wilson, 605.
“Nero was infamous as a greater persecutor than any other Roman emperor of the first century.”

If one is historically honest, then all the data points toward a pre-70 A.D. dating.

There are other internal indicators within the book of Revelation that pertain to its dating. The time-frame references within the book indicate events that are near, at hand, about to happen, will take place shortly, etc. Rev 11:1-2 seems to speak of the Temple in Jerusalem as still standing. The Temple in Jerusalem is critical to understanding the dating question. If an earlier date is accepted, then most of the prophecies within Revelation relate to the beginning of Christianity, not its end. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, one of the most important events in the first century of Christianity, then becomes a primary focus of the book. God’s wrath is understood as being poured upon those who rejected the Messiah. If, however, the popular late date is accepted, then these events are virtually excluded as fulfillments of the prophecies within the book. This has led to a popular wave of understanding in evangelical Christian circles that sees a pessimistic view of Christian history, one in which events grow progressively worse until Christ returns. It has caused some, when confronted with the “nearness” texts, to either allegorize the time texts, or worse, to claim that John (and therefore the Holy Spirit!) must have been mistaken about the time frame for the events. Thus, the dating issue is not a minor question. It goes beyond simply interpreting the book and affects one’s outlook on all of Christian history and the reliability of all of God’s word. This author has endeavored to show the unreasonableness of a Domitian dating for the book of Revelation. Hopefully, a more proper understanding of the dating issue will lend itself more solid exegesis.

170 Beale, 23.
172 Wilson, 604.
173 Gentry, Beast, 109
174 Ibid., 111.
175 Ibid.
Appendix III: Outline of the Book of Revelation

The following is an outline of the book of Revelation. The bold portion of the outline represents the portion of the book examined in this paper.

I. Introduction (chapter 1)
II. The letters to the seven church (chapters 2-3)
   A. Ephesus
   B. Smyrna
   C. Pergamum
   D. Thyatira
   E. Sardis
   F. Philadelphia
   G. Laodicea
III. Worship in heaven (chapters 4-5)
   A. Worship of the Creator
   B. Worship of the Lamb
IV. The opening of the seven seals (chapters 6 and 7)
   A. The four horsemen (6:1-8)
      1. The first seal
         a. The white horse
         b. The rider with the bow and crown
         c. The power to conquer
      2. The second seal
         a. The red horse
         b. The rider with the sword
         c. The power to remove the peace
      3. The third seal
         a. The black horse
         b. The rider with the set of scales
         c. The price of food
      4. The fourth seal
         a. The green horse
         b. Death and Hades
         c. The authority upon a fourth of the land
            i. By sword
            ii. By hunger
            iii. By death
            iv. By beasts
   B. The fifth seal and the cry of the martyrs (6:9-11)
   C. The sixth seal and the disasters on earth (6:12-17)
   D. The interlude before the seventh seal (7:1-8:1)
V. The seven trumpets (Chapters 8-15)
   A. The plagues and disasters
   B. The little book
   C. The two witnesses
D. The seventh trumpet
E. The signs in heaven
   1. The players
      a. The woman
      b. The dragon
      c. The male child
      d. The seed of the woman
   2. The war in heaven
   3. The two beasts
      a. First beast
      b. Second beast
   4. The followers of the Lamb
   5. The worshippers of the beast
   6. The wrath of God
   7. The temple of God

VI. The seven bowls (chapter 16)
VII. The fall of Babylon (chapters 17-18)
VIII. The return of Christ (chapters 19-20)
   A. End of the beasts
   B. Binding of Satan
   C. Judgment seat of God
IX. The new heavens and the new earth (chapters 21-22:9)
X. Conclusion (22:10-21)
## Appendix IV: Comparison of Revelation 6 and Eschatological Discourse of the Synoptic Gospels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rev 6</th>
<th>Mt 24</th>
<th>Mk 13</th>
<th>Lk 21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2: 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; seal; rider on white horse with bow, conquering</td>
<td>4-5: false christs misleading many</td>
<td>5-6: same</td>
<td>5-6: same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4: 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; seal; rider on red horse with sword, removes peace</td>
<td>6-7a: wars</td>
<td>7-8a: same</td>
<td>9-10: same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6: 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; seal; rider on black horse with scales, famine</td>
<td>7b: famines and earthquakes</td>
<td>8b: earthquakes and famine</td>
<td>11: earthquakes, plagues, famine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8: 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; seal; death and Hades; killing with sword, famine, pestilence, wild beasts</td>
<td>(culmination of previous plagues)</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11: 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; seal; persecution and martyrdom</td>
<td>9: tribulation, hatred and death for believers</td>
<td>9: persecution</td>
<td>9: same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13a: 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; seal; earthquakes, black sun, blood moon, falling stars</td>
<td>29: darkened sun and moon, falling stars, powers of the heavens shaken</td>
<td>24-25: same</td>
<td>25a: signs in sun, moon, and stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-17: sky split; mountains and islands moved; people hide from wrath of Lamb</td>
<td>30: Son of Man appears, tribes mourn</td>
<td>26: Son of Man appears</td>
<td>25b-26: dismay among the nations, terror, powers of heavens shaken; Son of Man appears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13b: fig tree metaphor</td>
<td>32: fig tree parable</td>
<td>28: same</td>
<td>29-30: same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Cf. Charles, 158; Vos, 186. My chart differs slightly from Vos, and significantly from Charles (with regard to the first two riders). I have not found any reference from these sources on the use of the fig tree comparison by the Lord. The metaphor is not the same as the parable, but both make use of fig tree imagery.
Appendix V: Sermon Points and Application of Passage

I. God is sovereign in all things.

When reading the events surrounding the breaking of the seals and the opening of the scroll in Revelation, one cannot overlook the absolute sovereignty and authority displayed by God. It is the Lamb who opens the seals. When the four living creatures call for the horsemen, they do so because of the Lamb’s divine action. No matter what the circumstances seem, He is in control. He gives authority to the horsemen, but He also restricts that authority. He is in control of all of the events of chapter six, just as He is in control of all of history.

II. We are called to be faithful to God and to His Gospel.

The message of Revelation is to remain faithful to God, despite whatever the present circumstances may seem to indicate. We are to remain faithful to Him, to His Gospel, and to His commands. Those He justly deals with in the breaking of the seals are those who have rejecting Him and His Messiah.

III. Those who oppose the Lamb are doomed to suffer His wrath.

In Rev 6:1-8, the wrath of God is poured upon those who have rejected Him. The Jews who rejected Him and crucified the Messiah are justly condemned for their crime. Their rejection of Jesus would lead to the following of false teachers and false messiahs, which, in turn, would continue the downward spiral of death and destruction brought by the horsemen. This is the fate of those who oppose Jesus Christ.

We, as Christians, are to remember that God has already won the battle. The victory was His from the beginning, and Christ Himself accomplished it upon the cross. We are to remain faithful to Him and His word, not forsaking His Gospel, or we will fare no better than those of the first century who rejected Him. The vision of four horsemen may have pointed to the final destruction of Jerusalem, but it not simply confined to the past as ancient, incidental history. It is a warning to us. We are either for Christ or we are against Him (Mt 12:30). He has made it painfully clear the final outcome for those who oppose Him and reject Him. Outside of Him, we have no hope. As Christians, we are to remain faithful to Him to the end. We are not to compromise with our culture (as some did in the early Church), but we are to work for the transformation of our culture. If we remain true to Him, then, by His grace and power, we will share in the victory. However, if we
reject Him, then we are destined to suffer, as did those who beheld the ravages of the four horsemen of Rev 6.
Sources Consulted


