

The First Four Seals

A series on Divine Judgment (part 6)

After Jesus' evaluation of the spiritual state of select churches (Rev 2:1 - 3:22), the apostle John is commanded to come up to heaven to see "what must take place after these things" (Rev 4:1). For the first time, he sees God, the four living creatures and the twenty four elders.

As a side note, many commentators have wondered who these twenty four elders are. Because Jesus promised the disciples that they will have a throne ruling the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:27-28; Luke 22:28-30), many speculate that they will be part of the twenty four elders; however, the apostle John is seeing the twenty four elders, and he's not in that group!

The songs of worship to God are revealing.

The four living creatures proclaim the holiness of God day and night without ceasing:

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." (Rev 4:8)

The twenty four elders proclaim the sovereignty of God, and they end on the thought that "You created all things, and because of Your will they existed" (Rev 4:11). This sets up a contrast, because the scroll with the seven seals is introduced next; when the seals are broken, it is the beginning of the end of human history.

And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." (Rev 4:9-11)

In the right hand of God is the scroll that no one is worthy enough to open and break its seals (Rev 5:2-4). As the apostle John begins to weep, one of the elders announces the appearance of Jesus in heaven, "behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals" (Rev 5:5).

Jesus Christ was the only one who could open the scroll, because He:

1. Overcame the judicial penalty for sin and paid it in full with His death.
2. Overcame the righteous wrath of God His Father and satisfied it completely with His death.

When Jesus takes the scroll from the right hand of God His Father, the songs of worship that follow, emphasizing His death and work of atonement, exalt and praise Him with honor and glory.

The four living creatures and twenty four elders praise Jesus for fulfilling the Mosaic Covenant (Ex 19:5-9; Matt 5:17):

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." (Rev 5:8-10)

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The myriads of myriads of angels, who are not entitled to Jesus' work of atonement, recognize the magnitude of His obedience to His Father that results in His sacrificial death.

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."
 (Rev 5:11-12)

It appears that all of Creation recognizes the sovereignty of God and His Son. While this is difficult to understand, there is an example of an eagle speaking (Rev 8:13), which suggests that at the end of time, the natural world may be a bit different.

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." (Rev 5:13)

When Jesus breaks the first four seals, there is a pattern of events that occurs: 1) Jesus breaks a seal, 2) a living creature says, "come," 3) a horse comes from somewhere in heaven, and 4) a rider is given the authority to do something to earth. A chart can be used to record the observations of the text:

	Seal 1 (Rev 6:1-2)	Seal 2 (Rev 6:2-3)	Seal 3 (Rev 6:5-6)	Seal 4 (Rev 6:7-8)
Third Heaven (location of the Temple of God)	First living creature commands White horse Rider with a bow is given a crown	Second living creature commands Red horse Rider is given a great sword and granted to take peace from earth so that men would slay each other	Third living creature commands Black horse Rider with a pair of scales in hand	Fourth living creature commands Ashen horse Rider with the name Death, with Hades in tow, is given authority over 25% of the earth to kill by the sword, famine, disease, and wild animals
Fate of the World	People and nations go out to conquer each other	Killing, murder and death	Famine and food inflation	25% of the world's population dies by murder, starvation, disease and wild animals

Colored horses with angelic riders have been seen elsewhere in the Bible. The prophet Zechariah saw such horses in his prophetic visions.

In Zechariah's first vision, he sees a a single red, light brown, and white horse whose angelic riders patrol the earth.

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On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, as follows: I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a **red** horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with **red**, **sorrel** and **white** horses behind him. Then I said, "My lord, what are these?" And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "I will show you what these are." And the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth." So they answered the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees and said, "We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth is peaceful and quiet." (Zech 1:7-11)

In Zechariah's eighth vision, he sees four chariots each being pulled by a separate groups of colored horses: red, black, white and ashen. As in his first vision, Zechariah is informed that these horse driven chariots are patrolling the earth, and these horse colors match those of the apostle John's vision in Revelation.

Now I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains; and the mountains were bronze mountains. With the first chariot were **red** horses, with the second chariot **black** horses, with the third chariot **white** horses, and with the fourth chariot strong **dappled** horses. Then I spoke and said to the angel who was speaking with me, "What are these, my lord?" The angel replied to me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth, with one of which the black horses are going forth to the north country; and the white ones go forth after them, while the dappled ones go forth to the south country. When the strong ones went out, they were eager to go to patrol the earth." And He said, "Go, patrol the earth." So they patrolled the earth. Then He cried out to me and spoke to me saying, "See, those who are going to the land of the north have appeased My wrath in the land of the north." (Zech 6:1-8)

In light of Zechariah's vision and Jesus' sequence of breaking the first four seals, the riders of each colored horse appear to work in concert with each other as they carry out God's wrath upon the earth. And these angelic beings are unfallen good angels.