***The Doctrine of Death, No. 2

RV121-01***

We continue studying the fourth seal. This is segment number 3. This seal is described for us in Revelation 6:7-8.

In Romans 6:23, we read that "The wages of sin is death." This declares for us that the results of serving sin is to receive the wage of death. That does not make sin a very attractive employer in the human race. During the tribulation era, the grim reaper will be cutting down literally millions of human beings because of their sinful rebellion against God and the authority of His word.

**The Rider on the Pale Horse**

The apostle John hears the last living creature angel called forth: the fourth horsemen of the apocalypse. A rider appears on a pale horse. We are told right off the bat that the rider's name is death. So, we know very clearly what this horse represents. The horse is, furthermore, followed by Hades, which gobbles up those who are struck down by the death rider. Hades today is the place of suffering in the center of the earth to which the souls of unbelievers go at death to await the second resurrection after the millennium, when they will stand at the Great White Throne to be condemned, and then to be transferred into the lake of fire for all eternity.

**Physical Death**

So, physical death does not end one's existence. A person's soul goes into Hades, and he is fully conscious after death of what has happened to him. During the tribulation, there will be widespread death, and that will be a humiliation to Satan's man, the antichrist. It was, of course, the antichrist, and the people who support him, who will have promised society that once it was free from the influence and restraints of Bible believing Christians, the world would become a happy place; a very free place; and, a place where there was prosperity for all. Nobody would be in want of anything. That is the same theme which is being proclaimed today. It is the same lie that people will be grasping with enthusiasm as the tribulation begins.

However, after the rapture of the church, the vileness of man's nature will have no further restraint upon it. God the Holy Spirit, who resides in the church, will be removed (in terms of his personal presence) into heaven. He will, of course, be here in His omnipresence as deity, but His personal action will be removed. The result is that the sin nature of man will very quickly destroy freedom; it will very quickly destroy peace; and, it will very quickly destroy prosperity on the earth, and, in fact, will create a holocaust. Death has been conquered by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, so no one ever needs to fear it again. But the people in the tribulation, because they don't understand what Christ has done, and because nobody has ever explained to them what the Bible teaches about death, having drawn together, from all the various books of the Bible, what God has to reveal about that, have no preparation for the terrible events that will be facing them. For the Christian, his death is a promotion to his eternal inheritance and home, to await the resurrection of his body. For the unbeliever, death is a horrible experience of separation from God in eternal spiritual death, with conscious suffering to await the resurrection of his body.

The Bible doctrine of death must be understood if we are to know what is taking place, and the ground for comfort and hope at a time like that. Therefore, we now continue our study of the doctrine of death. We covered the first 13 points in the previous session.

1. **The Significance of Death for Others**

Our next point is the significance of death for others. When other people die, it has a significance to those of us who remain alive. We should not miss that the Bible says that we should learn something and be aware of something when other people around us fall in death.

* 1. **The Shortness of Life**

First of all, it reminds us of the shortness of a lifetime. In James 4:14, we read, "Whereas you do not know what shall be on the next day. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away." Life is a very trenchant thing. It is important that we understand that that is the nature of our daily lives. For every one of us sitting here now, tomorrow, it may be all over, in terms of physical life.

Job 14:1 says, "Man that is born of a woman is a few days, and full of trouble." So, the Bible makes it clear that when other people die, we should be aware of the fact of how short life is, and that that is the nature of our existence.

* 1. **The Futility of Human Wealth and Fame**

When other people die, it should remind one of the futility of human wealth and fame. This is so amply demonstrated in Mark 8:36-37: "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" This is talking about the futility of wealth and losing one's own soul.

In Ecclesiastes 5:15, Solomon says, "As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and he shall take nothing of his labor which he may carry away in his hand." The only thing that overrides that principle of what we take with us is that which we have invested in God's work in terms of eternity – what we have done with that weekly paycheck upon ourselves and in terms of God's work.

Job 21:13 adds this: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to Sheol." You know that Sheol is the Hebrew word for "Hades," which is the Greek New Testament word. So, Job, as he is pondering the issues of life, says, "They spend their days in wealth." But what is the significance of that? "In a moment, they go down to Sheol. That is the futility of any fame and any wealth in terms of evading the issue of death.

* 1. **The Need to be Prepared for Death**

Furthermore, when another person dies, it should remind one of the need to be prepared for his own death with salvation. Acts 16:31 sums it up by saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." We need to know what God wants us to do to be saved. Namely, He wants us to learn the gospel and then to believe it. What God does not want us to do, if we are to be saved, namely is for us to add anything to His provision for our eternal life.

* 1. **The Certainty of Judgment of the Lost**

When another person dies, it should remind us of the certainty of judgment of those who are without salvation. Our doom is absolute if we leave this life without Christ as Savior. In John 3:18, we have it put this way: "He that believes on Him (that is, Jesus Christ) is not condemned, but he that does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Then the last verse of John 3 says, "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life. He that does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Verse 36 says that if you have trusted in Christ as Savior, you know at this point in time have eternal life. It's not something you're going to get in the future. You already are a possessor of eternal life. Therefore, it's a very serious thing when somebody is asked whether they're going to heaven (whether they have eternal life), and they say, "Well, I sure hope so," thinking that this is something they will discover in the future. That is wrong. If you don't understand that you have it now, you can almost be certain that you won't have it when you get out there. It says, "He that believes on the Son." This is in spite of the fact that very many famous evangelists and famous Bible teachers like to say, "Invite Him into your heart. Invite him into your life. Ask Him to be your lord." All of this jet-set terminology is meaningless to people. God says, "I want you to believe. I want you to trust your soul to Me. Accept the plan that I've given you." If you believe the Son, you have everlasting life, and you have it now.

* 1. **We all have a Rendezvous with Death**

Also, every funeral is a reminder of the universal rendezvous with death that every human being has. In Psalms 89:48, we have to put this way: "What man is he that lives and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his own soul from the power of Sheol?" And the answer is that there is nobody who is going to escape the power of death. There's no one who's going to escape that ultimate event.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 says, "For the living know that they shall die," and those who are wise then we'll take into account the significance of death to others as it occurs.

1. **God can Elect to Prolong Life and Postpone Death**

God can elect to prolong life and to postpone ones death. There are times when God does exactly that. He can elect to postpone one's death. He can elect to prolong life. Psalm 118:18 says, "The Lord have chastened me very much, but He has not given me over until death." There are such times, just as in the case of David, and in the case of adultery with Bathsheba. There was only one penalty for that, and that was the penalty of death. Yet, God decided in His wisdom, and in David's attitude and response, and in God's sovereignty, that He would prolong David's life rather than bringing death upon him at that time. David continued with the most brilliant 25 years of his life after God had forgiven and prolonged his life. So God can elect to postpone believer's death.

Proverbs 14:27 says, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death. One of the ways that you preserve your life is to go to the fear of the Lord, which is the result of knowing His Word. You respect what God has said, and it will preserve your life. If you have disrespect for what God has said, you will introduce yourself to diseases; you will introduce yourself to emotional traumas; and, you bring death upon yourself. As one of the writers of the wisdom literature said, "Why would you die before your time?" Why would you cut short the time that God has given you by deliberately ignoring what God has said, and thereby bringing upon yourself a shortening of your lifespan? God can elect to prolong and postpone one's death.

1. **Love is Stronger than Death**

Death is used as a standard of comparison to the superior strength of love. That's a very interesting and odd comparison when God wants to say, "I want to tell you how strong the love is," and He compares it to death. To do that, Song of Solomon 8:6 says, "Set Me a seal upon your heart," that is, put Me as a signet; put Me as a seal upon your heart; hang Me around your neck on a chain like a ring that belongs to you, and signifies that I belong to you: "As a seal upon mind your arm, for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as Sheol; its coals are coals of fire, with a most vehement flame." This is talking about the power of love as compared to death. How powerful is death? It's overwhelming? When death comes, there's nothing you can do against it. You cannot resist it. You cannot destroy it. You cannot outwit it. You cannot outmaneuver it. When there is love, that is exactly what happens. Love has a powerful strength.

I heard Dr. J. Vernon McGee on the radio recently say that he really gets sick and tired of all of these people who are running around to marriage counselors. You know, the woods are full of these characters who stand up and spout platitudes, and have all kinds of a little grocery lists, and all kinds of enthusiastic observations to give you. And Dr. McGee said, "I don't look at that with much appreciation, because the only counsel that you can give, if there is a problem in marriage, is to get your love straightened out. If love is there, everything else is resolved." That's how powerful love is, and that's what Solomon is saying here. Love is so powerful that it will solve the problem. It will keep you from doing the cruelties to other people that you will do.

It's crazy to go to a counselor and have them say, "Hey, you shouldn't knock your wife into the wall every time she burns the toast." I mean, who has to go to pay a counselor to tell you that some idiot in the first place. But boy, these counselors are out there. You come in, and you listen to them 30 minutes and $50. It's a wonderful profession. They'll stand up before groups and speak and tell you things. If you know anything about the Bible, usually I sit there and cringe, and it's all I can do not to stand up and say, "That's dumb, let alone not being true," because of all the things they spout out that are contrary to the Word of God.

Any pastor who's doing his job of teaching people the Word of God is doing the job of counseling. That's what happens every time you walk into this auditorium. When people ask you what you were doing last Sunday, you should say that you've been going to speak to your shrink. You've been going to listen to your shrink: "Every Sunday morning and every Sunday night, I go to my shrink, and he stands up and he counsels me." We used to do it on hard chairs, but now we've bought these soft chairs, so everybody can lean back, and they just relax. Some folks actually close their eyes, and they just get carried away. And when they go out, boy, they just feel so good. We're looking for a kind that has a reclining back so everybody can click it like you do on the airlines and the bus, and you can lean back, and just get the maximum from this counseling session.

The Word of God is the counsel, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, that will make it for you. Don't be a sucker for all these people that are running around with their counseling. People often come to me and say, "I have a marriage problem. Can you give me advice for a counselor?" I say, "Yeah, well, I can tell you some organizations you can call, but, unfortunately, your problem is the result of a lack of understanding of the Word of God, which is the way you build love."

The Lord Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments up." Now, interpret that: "You're not going to love Me if you don't keep My commandments, and you cannot keep My commandments, so that you can love Me, unless you know them. Until you know what the principles of doctrine are, you cannot develop the quality of love – the genuine quality of love which is stronger than death itself. And death is terribly powerful, but love is more powerful than that. When you have love, then you don't slam a person around and say, "Hey, I'm going to divorce you." When there is love there, and that is in the stable, proper condition, you're not pushing your children around, and abusing them, and denying them their boyhood or their girlhood, or their opportunities to be able to blossom out and to develop into mature Christian men and women. Love is the thing that enables you to treat your friends with respect, even if they're dunderheads, and even if you have to shake your head at what they do and say sometimes. You still treat them with kindness, and you still treat them with the fact that: "If the Lord could love a worm like you, why can't one worm love another worm?"

Obviously, we should be capable of doing that, but it takes love to do that. We should be able to love God – really love God. That doesn't mean all of this emotional stuff that goes on in the charismatic circles, and of all this fake love of God, which is words and pretenses and rituals, but the real heartfelt affection for God that says, "What I have is yours. My life is yours. My time is yours. Yes. I'm going to invest myself. Yes, I will give up something that I'd like to do, so that I can be at the point of service for You, and so that I can be at a point of substantial, financial support of something for the need of Your ministry. I have plenty of money of my own that I don't really need, or that I would like to use for something else, but I will put it here. It's love that enables us to do that, and that's all. And it is love that enables us to serve as unto the Lord, and take the beatings that we take from people, who are actually the ones we're serving. The people who will mistreat you the most are the ones who are benefiting the most from the fact that you're investing your youth; you're investing your capacities; and, you're investing the days of your life in them, and in their eternal prosperity and blessing.

This is a significant comparison – that death is used as a standard of comparison to the superior strength of love. Death is so powerful. That's what real, genuine, God-given love is. You only get it from the Lord, and you only get it through His Word.

1. **God Delivers from Imminent Death**

God delivers one from imminent death in His sovereignty. That's always a great comfort. Many times, people find themselves in hazardous conditions. They find themselves where they are actually facing imminent death, or what could be potentially death. I suppose all of us could stop now, and we could spend the rest of the session saying, "Hey, I remember this time when I was doing this, and it looked bad. I remember the time I was a kid, and I got thrown into the pool, and I didn't know how to swim. And, boy, I was going down. Death was imminent, and something happened, and I was saved." We can remember these incidents: "I'm driving a car, and all of a sudden something happens out of the clear blue, and I go twisting and turning and skidding and bingo, there was imminent potential hazard and death, and God is preserving." It's fascinating when you stop and think how often the potential of physical harm and even death itself has been evaded for us by the hand of God. We've been preserved from it.

Look at Job 5:20. Job says, "In famine, He shall redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword." That's a powerful statement. When everybody else around you is dropping dead and starving from lack of food, somehow God is going to come through and preserve you with the sustenance you need. In the midst of combat, where the power of the sword is cutting people down in death, it misses you, and you survive. God preserves you.

In Psalm 33:18-19, we read, "He keeps back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and a multitude of his bones with strong pain."

Psalm 33:18: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him, and upon those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." It is absolutely God's prerogative, and He often does it. He preserves us from imminent death. So, that's a comfort to know that you and I are immortal until God decides it is the time for our death. We are immortal no matter what hits us, until God decides that our job is finished.

Psalm 56:13: "For you have delivered my soul from death. Will You not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

Then we may add Psalm 68:19-20: "Blessed be the Lord who daily loads us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. He who is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belongs the issues from death." He alone makes that decision. That's why it is not your privilege to take your own life. That is something that is in the hands of the Lord.

1. **Death can be a Nightmare or a Joy**

Death is a nightmare to the one lacking divine viewpoint values and standards in the mind, but is a joy to those who are spiritually oriented.

**Biblical Examples**

Take, for example, a group of people that we have in the Bible representing facing death with composure and joy. Job, for example, in Job 19:23, says, "O, that my words were now written. O that they were printed in a book; that they were engraved with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever. For I know that my redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though, after my skin, worms destroy the body, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another, though my heart be consumed within me."

Please remember that job is probably the first book of the Old Testament that was written. Job lived way back before the patriarchal period of Abraham, Moses, and that group. Here is this man with this enormous understanding of doctrinal principles that makes this tremendous statement that has been so often used in hymns: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that He shall stand the latter day upon the earth, and though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh, I shall see God." There was no doubt in the mind of Job that he was going to be alive again physically. You can just hear the ring of joy in that which he says.

Take Joseph, for example, in Genesis 50:24, as Joseph himself now is facing the fact that he doesn't have much time to live: "And Joseph said unto his brethren, 'I die, and God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land (that is the land of Egypt) unto the land which He swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.' So, Joseph died, being a 110 years old, and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." And later, when we have the description of the Jews leaving their captivity in Egypt, we are told that they took the bones of Joseph with them, because Joseph said, "I don't want to be resurrected here in Egypt. I want to be resurrected in the Promised Land. He knew what was ahead for him.

Notice the joy of Moses in Deuteronomy 31:28. Moses says, "'Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death you will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you, and evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.' Moses spoke in the ears of the congregation of Israel, the words of this song until they were ended. Then we don't have time to follow through with the expression of Moses joy. It's all of chapters 32 and 33. You may pursue that at your leisure, but it's just a tremendous story of joy that he is proclaiming.

Take the example of David. As a soldier, on many occasions he faced death, and knew the immanency of the reality of death that potentially faced him. And yet, in spite of that, there was always a settled peace, as so ably expressed in Psalm 23:4. David says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

The same is true of the saints in the New Testament. We think of the apostle Paul and his declaration concerning that which he anticipated in terms of the death that was before him. He wrote the book of 2 Timothy knowing that he would soon be executed by Nero. In 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul says, "For I'm not ready to be offered (that is, to be executed), and the time of my departure is at hand (I'm about ready to die). I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I've kept the faith. Henceforth, there's laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous shall give me at that day; and not to be only, but to all them that love His appearance." The crown of righteousness is a medal of honor that certain Christians will receive in heaven. It is a medal of honor for those who spent their lives in maximum divine good production. Paul says, "I've done that. I fought the fight. I kept the faith. I finished my course. I have the medal of honor secured and waiting for me – the crown of righteousness.

The example of Peter is another one. In 2 Peter 1:12, he faced the immanency of death with joy: "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth." Peter says, "I want to repeat things I've said to you before, to be sure that you remember them: "Yea, I think it's fitting as long as I am in this tabernacle (this physical body) to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off my tabernacle (my body), even as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me." These are not the words of a person who is in desperation and panic.

Verse 15 says, "Moreover, I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." This is a man who is making preparations for his departure.

On the other hand, death is a nightmare to those who like the preparation for that event, and understanding of what is taking place – a preparation to meet the God who is out there. A splendid example of that is Saul, the first king of Israel. In 1 Samuel 28:4, this is on the eve of the battle with the Philistines. Saul has been cut off from all communication with God. The prophets will not respond for him. He is in a desperate, fearful state: "And the Philistines gathered themselves together and came, and encamped in Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped in Gilboa. When Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by the prophets. Then Saul said unto his servants, 'Seek me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her, and inquire of her.' And his servant said to him, 'Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at Endor.'" So, he consulted a medium. He went to the occult to try to get information about what was going to happen the next day in battle.

Well, God permitted the dead Samuel to reappear, to rebuke Saul for looking to the occult world when God would not speak to him. Then Samuel told him what was going to happen. Verse 19: "Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and you sons shall with me. The Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hands of the Philistines." So, Saul, a born-again person, who was out of fellowship, who got into the occult, was told, "Tomorrow you're going to die, Saul, and you're going to be with me." Now, where was Samuel? He was in the Paradise part of Hades. He was in Abraham's Bosom. Saul was told, "Tomorrow you're going to be here in paradise with me, but you're going to pay the price of physical death, and your family is going to pay the price with you because your sons are going down too," including his splendid son, Jonathan.

Another nightmare is that rich man in Luke 16:19-31, which we've read before. You know the terror of that man as he realized that hell was for real, and he desperately tried to get information back to his brothers to escape his own fate.

1. **Jesus Christ brought Immortality of Believers**

Jesus Christ, through His own physical death and triumph over it, has brought immortality for all. Because He lives, we too shall live. Immortality means incapacity to die. 2 Timothy 1:10: "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death. It brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." So, we do have the capacity now, as believers, to one day be immortal.

1. **Death is the Last Enemy**

The last enemy of mankind to be overcome is death itself. The way God is going to overcome death is to reverse it. Every human being who has ever lived, and every human being who's been aborted, is going to be brought back to life, whether he is saved or unsaved. 1 Corinthians 15:26 declares that the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. God's going to reverse the whole process.

1. **The Body Sleeping**

The death of a Christian is described in terms of the body sleeping. 1 Corinthians 15:51: "Behold, I show you a mystery. We (Christians) shall not all sleep. We will not (every one of us) die, but we shall all be changed." At the moment of the rapture, some of us will still be alive.

1. **Not Hopeless Sorrow**

Christians do experience sorrow at the death of loved ones and friends, but not in a hopeless fashion of unbelievers and of the spiritually disoriented. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 tells us we have a ground for hope. Paul says, "But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning them who are asleep (who have died), that you do not sorrow, even as others who have no hope." We sorrow, but not as those who are without hope.

1. **Angels Carry the Believer into Heaven**

The believer, when he dies, is carried into heaven into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ by a band of angels. Luke 16:22: "It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." So, that you do go out in a blaze of glory with an honor guard that is something else.

**Authority**

Now, with that background, let's go back to Revelation 6:8: "And I looked, and behold, a pale horse (the color of death). His name that sat on him was death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given unto them." The word "power" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the word "exousia," and this word means "authority." The word connotes the right to act, and thus denotes a freedom of action. This word is used of God's authority and freedom to determine a person's eternal destiny.

This same word, for example, is used in Luke 12:5 in this way: "But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who after he has killed has power ("exousia" – authority or freedom) to cast into hell. Yea, I say unto you, 'Fear him.' God has the authority to decide where a person is going to spend eternity.

This same word is used in Ephesians 3:10 to denote a certain category of angel; that is, angels that carry a certain authority and a freedom, therefore, to act. It implies a divine authorization to do something here to a number of the members of the earth's population.

**Death of Over One Billion People**

So, John says, "Death and Hades (this dynamic duo) were given authority to do something. The word "given" is "didomi" in the Greek. It means that something was granted to them. It was done at the point when Jesus Christ turns death loose on the earth in the tribulation. It's in the passive voice, so it indicates that this authority was not taken, but was granted by God. It's a statement of fact. "Unto them" refers to death and Hades, and authority was given to them over a certain part of the planet earth, and that is one-fourth of the planet earth, indicating a fourth of humanity. It does not probably indicate just one-fourth of a geographic area, but one-fourth of the human population in the tribulation. It is a fourth of the "ge," which is the word for "earth," in contrast to the word for heaven.

So, one-fourth of the human population at this point in time would be about a billion people. There are about 4 billion people in the world today, so about a billion people are now going to come under the authority and the freedom of death to impose itself upon them. I don't know how to portray to you what a billion people are. That is 1,000 groups of a million people each. It is an enormous number of people. We're talking about that many people, within the span of three-and-a-half years, to die. I mean, they are going to fall like flies. The morticians are going to have a bonanza going for them like you wouldn't imagine. It's going to become the leading industry – the biggest service on the face of the earth at the time. And they're going to do it with bulldozers, because it's going to happen so quickly. It's going to be like on a field of combat where you simply must dig a hole and push all the bodies in and get them covered quickly to try to minimize disease.

So, God is always in charge of death. He determines the extent and its application at any point of time. We have that indicated to us in Revelation 1:18: "I am here that lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and have the keys of Hades and of death." It is this God who gives authority to death to exercise itself on one billion human beings.

Notice what happens: to do what to them says? It says, "To kill them." We are talking about physical death. The Greek word is "apokteino." "Apokteino" refers to physical death. It refers to the termination of life. It is in the aorist tense grammatically, which means that it's a point in the tribulation when death begins striking people. It's active. The pale horse rider does it. And it's, in the grammar, what we call an infinitive, which tells us that this is the purpose of God for the pale horse rider. It is God's purpose for him to bring down one billion human beings.

Here's how he's going to do it. He says, "He's going to do it with." The Greek word is actually "en," which normally means "in," but here it is used with a certain case that indicates "means." So, you can translate it as "by means of:" "And freedom of authority was given to death and Hades over one billion human beings on the face of the earth in order to take their physical lives by means of the sword." This is "rhomphaia." This is different from the other word that we've had for "sword," which was the standard weapon of the infantrymen in the Roman Legion – the short sword which was 12 to 18 inches long, which was used in close-in combat, and which was enormously effective. It transformed the Roman legions into a powerful military force that nobody could stand up against. This "rhomphaia" is the old long sword that sometimes had to be wielded with both hands in order to use it. Therefore, you were forever putting yourself in a position of slashing away where the body was exposed, and somebody with a shield could catch the blow, and the little short "machaira" sword of the Roman legions could come in there and do you in very nicely.

So, this, interestingly, is the long sword, but it is a battle sword. It is used for the purpose of death, and it is almost as descriptive as a scythe. That would be like a reaper going through that a scythe, cutting down a field. Well, this sword is just going to slash. If people have no defense, you can indeed take this long sword, and you can cut quite a swath through a group of human beings as you walk through them.

**War**

That's the picture here that death is going to do. The means of death here is war. At this point, we are dealing with more than bloodshed. This is death by war. Newer and deadlier methods of killing in battle are being developed today: chemical; bacteriological; and, laser weapons, and all the protesting and the marching makes it inviting for strong nations to attack those who have been weakened by the disarmament and freeze movements. Disarmament and freeze movements are going to pave the way for nations to be weakened, and for stronger nations then to take the opportunity to make war upon them. Freezing yourself in a position of military inferiority always brings war upon you. Disarmament always brings war upon you. So, the first cause of death is going to be death via war, through the bloodshed of weapons.

**Famine**

Furthermore, he says, "The second one is going to be by means of hunger." That's the word "limos." This word connotes "famine." You have it use that way in Acts 7:11 and in Acts 11:28. It means famine. So, it's natural. One of the things that war does, is that it destroys crops, and furthermore, it disrupts the flow of farmers to be doing their job, so that people find themselves starving because the food has not been planted. People simply starve to death, and they do it as the result of the lack that is brought on by the war itself.

This happens regularly today, particularly in countries whose spiritual orientation is Eastern mysticism. Countries who are operating on Eastern mysticism are always starving. The New Age religion of the antichrist will be the deification of man, and treating God is an impersonal force, just as it is done in starving Hindu societies today. So, if you want to create famine and starvation, I can tell you how to do it very easily. Just set up an economic system of socialism overridden by a religious system of Eastern mysticism, and you will have famine. There is no country in the world which is based upon Eastern mysticism, which is not starving today. There is no country in the world today which is based upon the economic system of socialism which is not struggling to get enough food to feed its people.

That's going to be quite a blow. The antichrist comes along, high; wide; and, handsome, and the New Age movement now is in full blossom. And the first thing that happens is that people begin starving, and they begin dying by the truckloads.

**Death**

Then the next way is by means of death ("thanatos"). Here it refers to an attack upon the physical body, but it is "thanatos" in a certain specific way. Here again, we have to resort back to the Old Testament Scriptures to give us a little clue, specifically, as to what kind of death we have in mind, because God pronounced a judgment upon Jerusalem and the Jews, because of their rebellion against His authority and against the Word of God, way back in Old Testament times. He said, "I'm going to cut you down in death." And He uses the same four methods that are used in Revelation. Therefore, this can be interpreted for us on the basis on the basis of Ezekiel 14:21, which says, "For thus says the Lord God, 'How much more, when I send my four severe judgments upon Jerusalem: the sword (war); the famine (starvation); (then it reverses the order a little bit and says) evil beasts (next); and, then pestilence (to cut off from it man and beast)."

**Disease**

So, this death is pestilence (disease). And disease regularly follows war, and disease regularly follows famine. If you starve yourself, your body organs are not going to be able to function. They will be exposed to disease.

So, here we have the disease that is raging in the antichrist's world. It seems that Revelation 6:8 is dealing with these same four punishments that Ezekiel is. So, we have: sword; famine; and, pestilence. The death of Revelation 6:8 refers to plagues of diseases. It sweeps through the antichrist's kingdom at all levels and all ages, and it's out of control. It's an epidemic. It's easy for Almighty God, the Creator, to outmaneuver all of rebellious man's vaunted technological and medical skills. The medical profession of the New Age society will be humiliated. It will be frustrated. Morticians will have a bonanza going for them.

The disease will strike down all ages. Sorrow and fear of death will be everywhere. Millions will fall into their graves and into Hades. Disease will also be spread by, perhaps, bacteriological warfare, which is now being brought to a refined point. That can easily be introduced into a nation's water supply. It can be turned loose through rodents; through ticks; and, through lice. It is no problem at all to be able to cause people to die from disease.

**Wild Animals**

Then finally, it says, "By means of "therion." That refers to wild animals. This word is used in Acts 28:4 to describe a deadly viper that bit the hand of the apostle Paul, and everybody around him thought that he was going to die. He shook the thing off, and it didn't affect him. They were amazed, and they knew that there was something different about this man immediately: "When the barbarians saw the venomous beast (the 'therion') hang on his hand." The previous verse tells us: "It was a viper." That's a very deadly snake. A viper is a snake that it does not take you long to die from once you have been hit.

So, here is a deadly animal. The word indicates a fatal quality – something which takes life. This is the word which is used to describe, in Revelation 13:1, the antichrist; and, in Revelation 13:11, his false prophet. They are called "beasts" because they are deadly animals to the human race. This is different from the word "zoon," which is used of the living creature angels, but which has been translated in the King James Version as "beast." It's a totally different word. These are beasts upon the "ge." This is the word for earth – the domain of wild animals creeping and walking. Animals are going to be maddened by hunger. The earth's vegetation is going to be destroyed. So, God is going to use these animals to devastate people. Millions will be clawed to death by roaming animals seeking food in desperation.

Consider rats alone. If you were to reduce the population of rats, and just have a few of them, they multiply so fast that, in one year's time, they'd be back up to the same population level. Remember, it is rats who are major food-eaters. In a country like India, that wonderful country of Eastern mysticism, where a rat is a god, he is permitted to eat grain, and he cannot be killed. And they eat grain by the tons, and people starve to death. Rats carry bubonic plague. They carry fleas and ticks which are diseased. One-third of all of Europe was killed in the 14th century by the fleas carried by rats (bubonic plague). So, all you need is rats. That's the only "therion" you need, and you can wipe out millions of human beings, especially when God overrides the medical world so they can't solve the problem.

So, you have war followed by famine; by disease; and, by animal predators. It's a natural progression. Death in the tribulation, of course, will also include, as we shall learn shortly, widespread suicide in the desperation of people to escape the things that are happening to them. Let's just look ahead a little bit to Revelation 6:15: "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains; and the mighty men; and every slave; and every free man hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains." These are the leaders of nations. These are the elitists as well as the common man.

Verse 16: "And said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.'" They called out to the very mountains to crush them to death. They're trying to take their own lives through suicide.

So, people in the tribulation will begin with a confident declaration of peace and plenty. Finally, everybody is going to have what he needs, only to end up whimpering in pain and in death. But if you think this is bad, this has only touched a billion people. This only touched a certain segment of the planet earth. The worst is yet to come, as we shall see in the future.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1984

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