

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

Revelation 6

In all the classes the teacher should summarize briefly the first five chapters, stressing the throne, the four beasts, the sealed book, and the lamb, as a preparation for the visions which followed.

Doctrinal Points

All the prophecies in the Word relate to things which affect the souls of people.

The effects of the prophetic Word differ according to the states of mind and heart of people.

No one can understand the Word without doctrine.

Notes for Parents

Ever since the book of Revelation was written—about A.D. 90—the Christian world has been busy trying to interpret it. It is the prophetic part of the New Testament and, unlike the books of the Old Testament prophets, there is no possibility of associating any of it except the first three chapters with events of John's own time. It obviously foretells things to come.

Many attempts have been made to connect various wars and battles which have taken place during Christian history with some of these visions of John, and such attempts are still being made. The four horsemen in our chapter for today have especially intrigued men's imagination and even—not too many years ago—furnished the material for a best seller.

We ought to realize, however, that the Bible is given to teach us spiritual lessons and that all the prophecies in the Bible are pictures not of worldly happenings but of things which happen in people's souls under certain conditions. You may remember in our lesson about Jesus on the road to Emmaus, how the Lord "opened the understanding" of the apostles to understand the things concerning

Himself in all the Scriptures. The “seals” which are opened in our chapter for today are seals with which the Lord closes these inner things in the Bible until He finds people ready to make some good use of what is there. People who do not want to live according to the Lord’s laws are better off without the knowledge, for sin is doing what we know to be wrong.

This is what the Lord is trying to impress upon us in our chapter. The opening of the seals affects people differently according to the states of mind and heart in which they are, and the four horses and their riders are pictures of different ways in which people receive the truth about their souls as it is presented to them in the Word of God. (1) Some people welcome all the truth they can learn and use it to discover and correct their faults and to help them live as the Lord would have them live. This kind of reception is symbolized by the white horse. (2) Some people like to learn the truth only in order to condemn other people, without applying it to themselves at all. This is pictured by the red horse. (3) Some are not interested in learning anything from the Bible about their souls, but like to pick out a verse here and there and haggle over its literal meaning, as if that was all there was to the Bible. This attitude is represented by the black horse. (4) And then there are those who reject the Bible altogether because they have no intention of doing anything except get all they can for themselves in this world; so the Lord cannot reach their souls at all: they are spiritually dead. This state of mind is portrayed by the pale horse.

The Lord has given the Bible to all of us and the truth is there, deeper and deeper truth as we study it and try to live it out. Each of us is free to choose between the Lord and self, and when we go into the other world, the judgment is according to our own choice. This is what the rest of our chapter teaches us.



Primary

Center the lesson around the apostle John, reminding the children of the stories they have had in which he figured, and making clear that he was John the

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apostle, not John the Baptist. Then try to impress the children with the wonder of what the Lord let John see. Tell them the first visions and then read the lesson, trying to have them remember the colors of the horses in order. Deal with the place of the book of Revelation in the Bible. In reviewing the first five chapters, stress the fact that the sealed book is the Word and that the lamb is another name for the Lord. Try to make the children feel an eagerness for the understanding of these visions which they will have when they are older.

Do you remember how many men the Lord chose to be His apostles? There were twelve. The first four He chose were two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John. They were all fishermen, and the Lord told them that if they would follow Him, He would make them fishers of men. So they left their nets and followed Him.

John is the one we want to think about this morning. He was probably the youngest of the twelve, and is called “the beloved disciple.” It was he together with his brother James and Peter who saw the Lord transfigured. After the Lord ascended to heaven, John was one of the four men chosen to write down an inspired account of the Lord’s life. The other three were Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Do you know what we call these accounts?

But John was chosen for another great work when he was a very old man. He had been faithful to the task which the Lord had given to the apostles and had helped to spread the good news about the Lord through all the country called Asia Minor. Seven Christian churches had been formed there, and they all looked up to John as their leader.

But there were always people who hated the Christians, just as the scribes and Pharisees had hated Christ Himself. They did not put John to death, but they took him away from his people and put him out on an island, the island of Patmos, to live.

John was a very old man when he was given this revelation.

He was head of seven Christian churches which had been established in Asia Minor.

The first chapter of Revelation tells how the Lord appeared to John in Patmos.

His appearance was even more shining and wonderful than when John, with Peter and James, had seen Him transfigured.

But John recognized Him as the same Lord he had known so well.

First He gave John messages for the seven churches in Asia Minor.

Then He gave him a vision of a great throne with twenty-four elders sitting on seats around it.

And there were also four “beasts” or living creatures, which were cherubim, one like a lion, one like a calf, one like a man, and one like a flying eagle.

In the hand of the one who sat on the throne John saw a book sealed with seven seals, which only the Lord could open.

We have learned that this book was the Word.

Today our story is about the opening of some of the seals by the Lord, who is here called the lamb.

What did John see when the first seal was opened?

What did he see as each of the next three was opened?

When you are older, you will be able to learn what these four horses mean.

Junior

A review of the story of the first five chapters of Revelation should precede the actual lesson. Give the children a chance to tell anything they remember from other years. Then take up the four horses in some detail, finishing with a suggestion of their general meaning, and of the meaning of the rest of the chapter.

Which Gospel follows the Gospel of Luke?

Who was John?

John was probably the youngest of the apostles and he lived the longest. Several times in the Gospels he is called “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” There are many traditions concerning his later life and his work as an apostle, and it seems fairly well established that he finally made his home at Ephesus and was regarded as the head of the seven Christian churches which had been established in Asia Minor. Find the names of these seven cities on a map of the New Testament world.

See also if you can find on the map the island of Patmos. For many years the Christians were feared and hated by the rulers of the countries where they lived, just as the Lord Himself had been feared and hated by the chief priests and by the scribes and Pharisees. John is thought to have been about ninety years old when he

was banished to the island of Patmos. He tells us the reason for his exile in Revelation 1:9. It was in Patmos that the Lord appeared to him in a glorious form (Revelation 1:12-16) and told him to write down all he saw and heard. Then He gave John messages for the seven churches and then a long and wonderful vision, which was a prophecy of what would happen in the souls of the people of the Christian Church as the centuries rolled on. What John wrote down we have in the last book of our Bible, the book of Revelation.

The first chapter is a vision of the risen and glorified Lord. Chapters 2 and 3 contain the messages to the seven churches. We learn from them that each of these churches was different from all the others and that each had its good points, but also that each had developed certain faults which the Lord wanted to point out to its people so that they might be corrected. He gave each church a warning, and made each one a special promise if it would repent and be faithful. In chapter 4 we have the vision of the great throne (which was a picture of judgment) with the twenty-four elders sitting on seats around it, and the four “beasts” or cherubim, the first like a lion, the second like a calf, the third like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle. And they were all praising the one who sat on the throne. Finally in chapter 5 is the vision of the book sealed with seven seals, which was in the right hand of the one who sat on the throne, and the promise that the “Lion of the tribe of Juda,” who also appeared as a lamb, would loose the seals and open the book. The book was the Word and the Lamb was the Lord Himself.

In our chapter for today we have the vision of the opening, one after another, of the first six seals, and what John saw each time.

What did John see when the first seal was opened?

What weapon did the horse’s rider have?

What else was given him?

What was he to do?

What did John see when the second seal was opened?

What weapon did his rider have?

What power was given him?

What did John see when the third seal was opened?

What did his rider have in his hand?

What was he weighing?

What was he told not to do?

What did John see when the fourth seal was opened?

What was the name of his rider?

What power was given him?

You want to remember as much as you can about these four horses, for ever since the book of Revelation was written people have been wondering what they meant, and many guesses have been made about it. You will even find books written about these guesses. But the Lord has revealed through Swedenborg what the four horses represent, and when you are older, you will be able to study the meaning of every least part of this strange vision. Perhaps you can remember now that the horses picture the different ways in which people understand the Word of God and the effect that these different kinds of understanding have on the lives of the people themselves and on the world. And you can remember that the white horse pictures a true understanding. Read Revelation 19:11-13.

Do you remember how the Lord “opened the scriptures” to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and that they said that as they listened, their hearts burned within them? The opening of the fifth seal tells us how good people feel when the Word is opened so that its real meaning is seen. And the opening of the sixth seal tells how this same revelation affects the bad people who do not want the Lord’s truth because it shows up the evils in their lives.

Intermediate

The correspondence of the opening of the seals one after another and of the effect as pictured by the four horses and their riders is the major lesson for this class. The teacher should study the details of the vision as given in the Adult notes and be able to add to the general correspondence wherever the young people show interest.

The book of Revelation, the last book in our Bible, is a wonder-

ful series of visions describing the inner states which would develop in the people of the Christian Church as the years went on. You may recall from earlier studies that these visions were given to the apostle John when, as a very old man, he was living in exile on the island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor. John, of course, had been among the apostles on the night of Resurrection day, when the Lord appeared to them and opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. In his vision on Patmos he was given to see how the truth in the Word, as it had been revealed to men by the Lord's life on earth, would gradually uncover deeper and deeper evils in men's hearts, and how some would choose to obey the truth and fight their evils, and how others would choose to deny the truth or to falsify it in one way or another so that they might continue in their evils.

John first saw the wonderful vision of the Lord standing in the midst of the seven lampstands, and was given messages of judgment and warning to the seven churches in Asia Minor over which he had charge, and then he saw the vision of the great throne of judgment and the twenty-four elders and the four creatures, and then the vision of the book sealed with seven seals, which the lamb was to open. Today we begin the vision of the opening of the seals.

The Bible is given us by the Lord to teach us how to live. He promises that if we live according to its teachings, we shall be happy both in this world and in heaven. Our common sense tells us that this must be true. Then why don't we always want to learn more and more of the truth and obey it? It is because we are selfish, and the Bible tells us that we must be unselfish. The more we understand about the Bible, the deeper we have to look into our own minds and hearts to find the selfishness and root it out.

So the opening of the seals in John's vision revealed greater and greater evils. As the first four seals were opened, John saw a series of horses with their riders. Horses in the Word picture intelligence, or our higher reasoning powers. Our reasoning power is one of our most useful faculties, isn't it? But sometimes we use it in the wrong way—for instance, to help us get what we want even though

we know it is bad for us to have it. We can do this even with what we know of the Bible. So the different horses picture the ways in which different people use the Bible.

The white horse pictures a true understanding of it from a desire to live according to its teachings, for the Lord will always enlighten us if we read the Word with this desire. So his rider had a bow to fight with and a crown to show that he was able to win in temptation. He went forth conquering and to conquer. The red horse pictures the false understanding of the Bible which people have who use it to excuse their own faults and to condemn other people. Such an understanding hurts rather than helps us. Black is the opposite of white; so the black horse pictures no real understanding of the Bible at all because of a lack of desire to study it seriously as a revelation from God. People of this kind often make a great fuss about little details in the letter of the Word, as the scribes and Pharisees did, but do not actually care much about truth and goodness. Read Matthew 23:23-24.

Finally at the opening of the fourth seal, a “pale” horse came out. This is a picture of those who have lost both the understanding of the truth and the desire to do right. You may remember in the parable of the Great Supper about the man who had married a wife and said that therefore he could not come. There is no hope of saving such people, because there is nothing in either their minds or their hearts to which the Lord can appeal to change them. So the rider on that horse was called Death, because when we turn altogether from the Lord, there is no life in our souls. And “Hell followed with him.”

The opening of the fifth seal showed all those who could be saved, and the opening of the sixth showed those who could not. These last wanted only to be hidden from the Lord, as we try to hide when we are doing something which we know to be wrong.

Basic Correspondences

the white horse = a true understanding of the Word
the red horse = the understanding of the Word
when we do not wish to be good

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the black horse = an understanding of the Word
in which there is no truth
the pale horse = understanding destroyed as to
both truth and good

Senior

There is so much in this lesson that all the teacher can do is to give its general meaning and discuss the quotation from the writings as a small example of the detailed interpretation. Try to impress the young people with the importance of cultivating a desire for all the spiritual truth we can get, and with the wealth which the Lord has put at our disposal.

The book of Revelation is the inspired record of a long vision given to the apostle John near the end of his life, when he was in exile on the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor. It is the strictly prophetic part of the New Testament and treats of the spiritual states through which the Christian Church would pass, of its gradual decline, the final judgment upon it, and the establishment of a new and lasting Christian Church, which is pictured as the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.

The book begins with John's vision of the Lord standing in the midst of seven lampstands and the messages which the Lord gave John for the seven churches in Asia Minor over which he was head. What we need especially to remember from chapters 2 and 3 for the purpose of our lesson for today is the fact that even as early as the time of the giving of this vision—somewhere around A.D. 90—the individual Christian groups were developing in different directions and were losing their first faith and zeal. Each of the seven churches had its good points and its faults; each of the seven messages of the Lord was couched in different terms; each church received a different warning, and each was promised a different reward for fidelity. People are different. They do not see things just alike. The Lord gives us the truth in His Word in such a way that we may choose to believe as much as we are willing to live by, and He holds us responsible for making the choice and for governing

our lives accordingly. The choice is an all-important one, for it determines our life to eternity.

Chapter 4 gives us the vision of the great throne, which is the symbol of judgment, and chapter 5 gives the added picture of the book sealed with seven seals, which only the “Lion of the tribe of Juda,” the lamb, the Lord Himself could open. In our study of that lesson we referred to Revelation 20:11-12, in which the judgment was accomplished by comparing the “books” which we write by our daily lives with the “book of life.” The difference between a good and a bad life is just in whether we truly wish to be led by the Lord or to be led by our own desires and thoughts.

The opening of the seven seals pictures the opening of our understanding to see what the Word really teaches. The opening of each seal judges people who are in one or another attitude of mind toward the Word. The four horses are four different ways of regarding the Word.

The white horse pictures a true understanding of the Word which the Lord will always give us if our purpose in reading it is to find out what He really says and how He wants us to live, so that we can obey and serve Him. The rider on the white horse is able to conquer in temptation. Later in the book of Revelation (Revelation 19:11-13) the white horse appears again, and his rider is called the Word of God.

The red horse pictures an understanding of the Word with no desire to obey it. Without the desire to apply the truth to the discovery and correction of our own faults, we use our intelligence and the truth which the Lord gives us in the Word in such a way that they work harm to others and to ourselves, for truth used for selfish purposes becomes falsified and destroys us.

The black horse pictures the use of the Word by those who have no understanding of its real meaning nor any real interest in it. This rider had a pair of balances and was weighing everything and paying a very small price for everything he received. This is the attitude of mind of the scribes and Pharisees, elaborating on the letter of the law and ignoring its spirit.

The pale horse pictures those who have lost both their understanding of the truth of the Word and their desire to do right. Because they have left themselves no way of approach to the Lord, they are riding to spiritual death.

The opening of the fifth and sixth seals reveals the states in which the good and the evil find themselves in the judgment. The good are humble and long to draw closer to the Lord. The evil try to hide from the face of the Lord. We can sometimes tell whether or not we are doing right by our willingness or unwillingness to have our thoughts and intentions seen by others.

Every detail of this vision has, as always, its particular meaning, which we can further study at length in Swedenborg's works on the Apocalypse. The quotation given at the end of this lesson is merely an example of what is there for us.



Adult

The meaning of the four horsemen emerges so clearly in the light of correspondence that a consecutive study of the opening of the six seals seems indicated for this class rather than the usual topical discussion. If possible, the teacher should take time to read the whole chapter in *Apocalypse Revealed*, noting the cross-references in the Word, which are of particular interest.

The “four horsemen of the Apocalypse” have caught the imagination of the Christian world for centuries. They have always been recognized as symbols of a progressive judgment, and many attempts have been made to interpret them in terms of one or another world crisis.

But the fact is that their application is spiritual, not material, and that they have to do with the inner states of all of us who live in this age of the Second Coming. For the judgment which followed the opening of the seals is the final judgment made possible by the opening of the inner meaning of the Word.

In the *Apocalypse Revealed* Swedenborg gives us this very brief summary of the meaning of this part of our chapter: “The exploration of those upon whom the final judgment is about to come, is

treated of; and what their understanding of the Word had been is discovered and hence what was the state of their life: that there were those who were in truths from good (verses 1-2); who were without good (verses 3-4); who were in contempt for the truth (verses 5-6); and who were altogether vastated as to good and truth (verses 7-8).”

The first type are those who will live in the heavens. They accept the truths of the Word and use them in combat against their evils. See Revelation 19:11-13.

The second type understand the truth but have no desire to live according to it.

The third type have no interest in or understanding of the truth, but wish to appear good and so, like the Pharisees, keep the letter of the law and argue about it.

The fourth type are wholly given over to self-love and the falsities which favor it.

All the last three types are destructive, and the forms of destruction are pictured in the powers given to the three riders.

In sharp contrast to them, the rider on the white horse had a bow in his hand, which is a symbol of doctrine. It is often called to our attention in the writings that the Word cannot be understood without doctrine. It is also stated that doctrine must be drawn from the letter of the Word and confirmed thereby. People have sometimes interpreted this to mean that we do not need the spiritual sense in order to understand the Word. But it is also pointed out in the writings that all the various Christian sects, like the Israelitish Church before them, have based their beliefs on the letter of the Word. So the question arises, “How are we to know what is the true doctrine?” The writings give us the basis of the answer in n. 91 of the *Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture*: “It has been shown above that the Word cannot be understood without doctrine, and that doctrine is like a lamp that enables genuine truths to be seen, the reason of which is that the Word has been written entirely by correspondences, and consequently many things in it are appearances of truth and not naked truths; and many

things also have been written in adaptation to the apprehension of the natural and even of the sensuous man, yet so that the simple may understand it in that the appearances of truth in the Word, which are truths clothed, may be caught at as naked truths, and when they are confirmed they become falsities. But this is done by those who believe themselves wise above others, although they are not wise, for being wise consists in seeing whether a thing is true before it is confirmed, and not in confirming whatever one pleases. The last is done by those who excel in a genius for confirming and are in the conceit of self-intelligence, but the former is done by those who love truths and are affected by them because they are truths, and who make them uses of the life, for these persons are enlightened by the Lord, and see truths by the light of the truths; whereas the others are enlightened by themselves and see falsities by the light of the falsities.”

We do not come at the truth without effort on our part. We must continually study the Word and the writings. But our study must be carried on with the mind humble and open to the Lord, and with the desire to learn the truth—even if it does not support our preconceived opinion—so that we may direct our lives by it. The rider on the white horse was given a crown, which is the symbol of victorious combat. The combat is against evil and falsity primarily in ourselves.

The rider on the red horse has no desire to see or to correct his own evils. His sword is truth falsified by being used for self-advantage. He uses this sword against others, and so destroys peace, and kills. Read Zechariah 1:8-15.

We know that darkness always pictures ignorance. The rider on the black horse had a pair of balances, which signify the “estimation of truth and good,” and the value he placed on the wheat and barley was very small. The wheat and barley here represent exterior good and truth. He is not allowed to “hurt” the oil and wine because they represent interior good and truth which are hidden from him so that they will not be profaned. For an interesting and illuminating comparison read AC 7601 concerning the plague of

hail in Egypt which destroyed the flax and barley but was not allowed to destroy the wheat and spelt (KJV: *rie*).

Finally compare the rider on the pale horse with the third excuse in the parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14): “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”

In thinking of the correspondences involved in this story, it is also interesting to remember that the four creatures, or cherubim, are mentioned in order with the appearance of the horses, and that the creatures are described in order in chapter 5 as being like a lion, a calf, a man, and a flying eagle. The lion is the symbol of power, and the rider on the white horse went forth conquering and to conquer. The calf is the symbol of natural goodness, which the rider on the red horse is able to destroy. The man is the symbol of the intellectual, for which the rider on the black horse has no use. And the eagle is the symbol of spiritual knowledges which are killed out of the mind by the rider on the pale horse.

In the last part of our chapter the opening of the fifth and sixth seals reveals the effect of the opening of the Word upon the good and the evil gathered in the spiritual world during the centuries of the first Christian Church. Swedenborg tells us that the permanent Christian heavens could not be formed until the Second Coming of the Lord had taken place and that until that time all the good from the Christian world were kept, guarded by the Lord, in a part of the spiritual world called “the lower earth.” These are the “souls under the altar” (verse 9). The evil who had called themselves Christians and expected to be saved were kept in “imaginary heavens.” These were the heavens which “departed as a scroll when it is rolled together” at the opening of the sixth seal. The evil then saw themselves as they really were and sought a place to hide from the face of the Lord.



From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, nn. 315-316: “A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny, signifies because the estimation of good

and truth is so small as to be scarcely anything. These are signified because by 'a measure (*choenix*)' which was the measure and the quantity measured, is signified quality, as above (314); by 'wheat' and 'barley' is signified good and truth; and by a penny (*denarius*) which is a very small coin, that they are held in little or no estimation . . . *And hurt not the oil and the wine*, signifies that it is provided by the Lord that the holy goods and truths, which lie interiorly concealed in the Word, shall not be violated and profaned. 'Oil' signifies the good of love, and 'wine' truth from that good, therefore 'oil' signifies holy good, and 'wine' holy truth."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What is the name of the last book in the Bible? *Revelation*
- P. To whom was this revelation given? *the apostle John*
- J. Do you remember what was the first thing John saw? *the risen Lord*
- J. For whom was he given messages? *seven churches*
- J. What great symbol of judgment did he see? *throne*
- J. Who were seated around the throne? *twenty-four elders*
- P. Who sat upon the throne? *the Lord (the lamb)*
- J. What other creatures appeared in the vision? *cherubim*
- P. What was in the right hand of the one who sat on the throne? *a scroll or book*
- P. What was this book? *the Word*
- P. With how many seals was it sealed? *seven*
- J. Who could open it? *the Lord (lion of Judah, lamb)*
- P. What did John see when the first seal was opened? *white horse*
- P. What did he see when each of the next three seals was opened? *red, black, pale horses*
- J. Who were seen when the fifth seal was opened? *those slain for the Word*
- J. What happened when the sixth seal was opened? *earthquake, etc.*
- S. What in general is pictured by the four horses? *different ways of regarding the Word*
- I. What does the opening of the seals mean? *opening of inner sense of Word to our understanding*