

Jehovah is sovereign over the distribution and inequality of foodstuffs and wealth, determining whether we own or rent property, live in a mansion or a hovel, are employed or unemployed, have empty or full larders, etc. Even man's sinful responses—the snobbery and condescension of the prosperous, and the envy and resentment of the poor—are not outside of the eternal decree of our heavenly Father.

The fourth and final horse in Revelation 6 is pale, the colour of a corpse, and its rider is “Death,” who is closely followed by “Hell” (8). Four terrible means of death are listed in Revelation 6:8.

First, there is the “sword,” which includes slaughter by bullet or bomb, or even through an infected wound or exhaustion in battle. This reminds us of the second seal (3-4).

Second, we read of death by “hunger,” from the scarcity of food and in times of famine. These things are covered in the third seal, as in the first part of this article (5-6).

Third, “Death” kills “with death”! To what does this refer? Death by accident or old age? It speaks of death by disease or pestilence (cf. Eze. 14:21) in all its different forms, including smallpox, flu, tuberculosis, malaria, cholera, HIV/AIDS, cancer, measles, diphtheria, etc. Diseases may be caused by bacteria, viruses or genetic disorders, and occur through poor quality water or air pollution, poor sanitation or malnutrition, etc.

Fourth, the rider on the pale horse kills “with the beasts of the earth,” such as wolves, snakes, elephants, scorpions, etc. Mosquitoes are more dangerous than any of these as “carriers, or vectors, for some of humanity's most deadly illnesses ... Mosquito-borne diseases cause millions of deaths worldwide every year with a disproportionate effect on children and the elderly in developing countries” (*National Geographic*).

Authority is given to the pale horse and its rider “over the *fourth* part of the earth” to kill human beings in these four ways: “with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.” A quarter speaks of the steady rate, the usual frequency, of human mortality, though it fluctuates somewhat at certain times.

Jesus proclaims, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18). Thus it is entirely fitting that the Triune God has appointed our risen Lord as the ruler over death, the One who sends forth the pale horse. From His throne in heaven, Christ has governed the deaths of billions of people all around the world for two millennia. He is absolutely sovereign over diseases, epidemics, medicine, health care, funeral services and mourning.

Our Saviour's rule over death includes all future deaths, including our own. Through Jesus' atoning sacrifice, the death of each child of God is “a passage into eternal life” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, A. 42), for Christ prepares our place in His Father's house and “will come again” to receive us unto Himself (John 14:2-3)! *Rev. Stewart*

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Covenant Reformed News

February 2022 • Volume XVIII, Issue 22

The Black and Pale Horses

After treating the white and red horses in the last issue, we now turn to the black and pale horses (Rev. 6:5-8). The black horse speaks of food and drink in terms of subsistence, famine and luxury. The “pair of balances” or scales is used to weigh food carefully (5). A “measure” (Greek: *choenix*) was a dry measure of about 2 pints, an adult male's requirement of food for a day (6). A “penny” was a working man's daily pay (6).

In other words, this speaks of the minimum food needed for survival. If a man can work, he can feed himself for a day with bread made from wheat (“A measure of wheat for a penny”) or for three days with bread made from barley, which is cheaper (“three measures of barley for a penny”).

But what about his buying other things? What about providing for his wife and children? What if he becomes sick or is injured? Economically, such a man ekes out his existence day by day and things are even harder if he has a family. The third horse is “black” for this is the colour of scarcity and famine (cf. Jer. 14:2; Lam. 4:8; 5:10).

The above describes the way it has been for most people over the last 2,000 years. Even in our day, there are many people who do not have enough to eat and so suffer hunger, ill-health or starvation, for example, in Haiti, N. Korea, Venezuela or parts of Africa. But in previous ages it was much worse!

But this is not all, for “a voice in the midst of the four beasts” cries out, “see thou hurt not the oil and the wine” (6). Wine and olive oil suggest that others possess plenty and even enjoy luxury. “Do not damage these things,” cries the voice; this would upset the wealthy!

There are huge economic disparities around the world and even within individual countries, such as South Africa and Suriname. There are the haves and the have-nots, the rich and the poor, and the First World and the Third World, though there are, of course, many degrees between these extremes.

Material poverty and economic disparity are also found in Christ's blood-bought church, considered both globally and in individual congregations. Our Saviour Himself said, “For the poor always ye have with you” (John 12:8).

Christ Himself opens the third seal and sends forth the black horse! This teaches us that agriculture and trade, failed crops and inflation, empty bellies and famine relief agencies, etc., are included in God's counsel and governed by the Lord Jesus seated at His right hand. “For promotion [or material prosperity] cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Ps. 75:6-7).

The Faith of Old Testament Believers

One reader of the *News* has sent this request: "I would appreciate if Rev. Hanko could write something concerning the faith of the Old Testament saints and how/where it differs from the faith of New Testament believers (Heb. 11:13; John 8:56)."

This is a very good inquiry (as are all the questions that we receive), but I believe that in referring to Hebrews 11:13 and John 8:56 the reader has already given us the basis for the answer to his own question. There is no essential difference between the faith of God's people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament!

Hebrews 11:13 says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." The only difference between their faith and ours is that we, by faith, have seen the *beginning* of the fulfilment of these promises in the coming and work of Jesus Christ, though we too still see the *completion* of those promises "afar off" but that is not an essential difference.

Jehovah's people in the Old Testament believed, loved and embraced God and His promises, for they were all promises of Christ. For the sake of these promises, they were willing to live as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Believing these same promises, we trust in the same God that they did, the God of Israel. Like them we, by faith, love these promises more than we love anything else and love the Christ of the promises. It is to those promises that we cling in the darkest times, as they did, and it is these promises that make us, with them, strangers and pilgrims on the earth (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

The whole of Hebrews 11 shows that their faith is the same as ours. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (1). Faith is its own evidence and, therefore, also its own assurance of things that eye hath not seen or ear heard or that have entered into the heart of man to understand. Faith needs no more proof than itself and needs no "scientific" proof that "the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (3). It does not need such proof today and never did. As it was both evidence and assurance for the "elders" (the saints of the Old Testament), so it is for us (2).

Faith for us is everything that it was for the Old Testament people of God. It offers "a more excellent sacrifice" to God (4), though no longer the animal sacrifices that pointed ahead to the sacrifice of Christ. Out of gratitude for Christ's sacrifice, faith offers "the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (13:15). Faith still translates us, as it did Enoch (11:5), so that "whosoever liveth and believeth in [Jesus] shall never die" (John 11:26), whether we go to heaven in the way Enoch did or in the ordinary way.

Faith always comes to God believing "that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). The testament makes no difference in that. Faith, "being warned of God of things not seen as yet," always finds refuge in an ark, no longer an ark of wood but an ark that was prepared on a cross of wood (7). Faith always goes

out with Abraham to a place which it after receives as an inheritance and he who has faith always goes not knowing "whither he went," but looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," for he is a stranger in this world as long as life lasts and is never again satisfied with any other city (8-16).

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets [and of John Hus and John Wycliffe and Martin and another John, of old Polycarp and of the two Margarets, of Ridley and Cranmer, and so many others]: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (32-34). Their successors, though unremembered in history, are doing the same today, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, elders and church members, who live everywhere and always by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20).

The rather minor difference between the faith of Old and New Testament believers is mentioned again in Hebrews 11:39-40: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Their faith waited for Christ to come. Now that He has come, our faith waits for Him to come again. That is a difference but not an essential difference. There is no true faith but faith in Christ and nothing for faith but Christ. By faith, whether in the Old or the New Testament it is: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise" (Prayer of St. Patrick).

John 8:56, the other passage cited by our enquirer, teaches us that the faith of Abraham (and of his true children) was in Christ just as ours is: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad," and that is the most important thing about the faith of Old Testament saints. Their faith united them to Christ (it was in God and in Christ) and, uniting them to Christ, it was their righteousness before God, their justification (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:16-25). It was, as it always is, saving faith.

How utterly foolish to teach that the Old Testament saints were saved by law works and by obedience to the law: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us [and in them], who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3-4).

What a testimony to the power of faith that, even in the Old Testament, faith rejoiced in Christ, saw His day and was glad, found its righteousness in Christ, obtained the victory over Satan and sin and hell, and hoped for, and was translated to, heaven! In every age, faith is in Christ and the gift of God, "Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:9-10). *Rev. Ron Hanko*