

A New Look at the Books of Revelation & Daniel End-Time Prophecies

Part 8: Seals 1-5

The Rise and Decline of the 6th Head of the Beast, the Roman Empire

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A NEW LOOK AT THE BOOKS OF REVELATION & DANIEL END-TIME PROPHECIES

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PART 8

SEALS 1–5 THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE 6TH HEAD OF THE BEAST, THE ROMAN EMPIRE

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE SEALS AND TRUMPETS

To correctly understand the historical events prophesied by the Seals and Trumpets, the Biblical context of interpretation is determined by the following:

1. Jerusalem and Israel are at the center of Biblical prophecy.
2. The Heads of the Beast represent empires that ruled Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.
3. The Seals and Trumpets 1–6 relate to the empires of the Beast.
4. The Seventh Trumpet relates to the Rapture (Catching Up) and Second Coming.

WHAT IS PAST AND WHAT IS FUTURE

In this study, we will show that the first five Seals of Revelation (Revelation 6) describe real and specific historical events relating to the 6th Head of the Beast from the Sea, the Pagan Roman Empire. The First Seal describes the Pagan Roman Empire at its greatest geographic expansion in the Second Century. The Second, Third, and Fourth Seals describe the period of time known as the Crisis of the Third Century, when the combined forces of war, economic depression and inflation, and vast depopulation came close to collapsing the empire. This was a major turning point in the history of the Roman Empire in the west that signaled its decline and subsequent downfall in the Fifth Century. The Fifth Seal describes the persecution and martyrdom of believers in Messiah Yeshua by the Pagan Roman Empire, prior to the legalization of Christianity by Roman Emperor Constantine in the Fourth Century.

In the following parts of this study, we will show that Seals 6-7 and Trumpets 1-4 deal with the Fourth through Sixth Centuries, when the Roman world was shaken by catastrophic natural events that further destabilized and weakened the Roman empire in both east and west, facilitating the spread of Islam (8th Head of the Beast) throughout the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world (Trumpets 5-6). Then the Seventh Trumpet signals the Rapture (Catching Up), coinciding with the resurrection of the Two Witnesses, and Messiah Yeshua's Second Coming (Revelation 11:11-15).

NO FUTURE SEVEN-YEAR TRIBULATION

As previously shown, there is no future seven-year Tribulation because the 70th Week of Daniel has already been fulfilled (see Parts 1, 2, and 3 of this study). The 70 Weeks Prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27) is about the First Coming of Messiah Yeshua.¹ The covenant of the 70th Week is the New Covenant, not a future false peace treaty made by the Antichrist with Israel. The 70 Weeks Prophecy is completely fulfilled, including the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem.

¹ The Lord's Hebrew name is *Yeshua*, the shortened form of *Yehoshua* (Joshua), meaning "YHVH is salvation". YHVH (*Yehovah*) is the name of God. Messiah (Hebrew: *Mashiach*) means "anointed" (Greek: *Christos*). *Yeshua HaMashiach* means "Yeshua the Messiah".

Therefore, there is no future seven-year Tribulation and no future Antichrist who will rule the world and force people to take the Mark of the Beast.

As explained in Part 6 (“The Man of Lawlessness & the Apostasy – Emperor Constantine & the Roman Church”), the erroneous interpretation of a future Antichrist originated in 1585 by a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest, Francisco Ribeira (Ribera), to oppose the Protestant historicist interpretation linking the Papacy to the Antichrist.² Ribeira proposed the false interpretation that the Antichrist would rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, proclaim himself to be God, kill the Two Witnesses, and rule the world.³

For over 200 years, Protestants wisely rejected this false interpretation. Not until 1827 was it introduced into Protestant circles by Samuel Maitland and popularized by the works of J. N. Darby (founder of dispensationalism) beginning in 1830.⁴ Today the teaching is so widespread that it is often accepted without question. As a result, the Seven Seals and Trumpets 1–6 are misinterpreted as yet to take place during a future seven-year Tribulation.

REVELATION’S PANORAMIC VIEW OF HISTORY FROM THE FIRST TO THE SECOND COMING AND BEYOND

The Book of Revelation reveals major historical events occurring in the period soon after the First Coming through to the Second Coming. It also gives us a picture of the Millennial Kingdom, the Great White Throne Judgment, and the eternal New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem.

The Seals (1-7) and Trumpets (1-6) have to do with the 6th, 7th, and 8th Heads of the Beast, including the fall of the Western Roman Empire (6th Head of the Beast), the fall of the Eastern

² Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views – A Parallel Commentary*, p. 42.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Ribera (section “Apocalypse commentary”).

⁴ Gregg, p. 42.

Roman (Byzantine) Empire (7th Head of the Beast), and the rise of the Islamic empire(s)/Caliphate⁵ (8th Head of the Beast).

EVENTS TO BEGIN SOON AFTER JOHN'S VISIONS

In the first verses of the Book of Revelation, we learn that Messiah Yeshua came to reveal future events that would “shortly” (NASB, KJV, Amplified) or “soon” (NIV) begin to take place:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ [Yeshua HaMashiach – Yeshua the Messiah], which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, **the things which must shortly take place**; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John (Revelation 1:1, emphasis added).

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear **the words of the prophecy**, and heed the things which are written in it; **for the time is near** (Revelation 1:3, emphasis added).

Messiah Yeshua revealed to John that the prophesied historical events would soon begin to unfold. History proves this to be the case, as the historical events of the Seals began to take place soon after John recorded his visions in the Book of Revelation in about AD 95.

⁵ “A **caliphate** (from the Arabic خلافة or khilāfa) is an **Islamic state** led by a supreme religious as well as political leader known as a *caliph* (meaning literally a *successor*, i.e., a successor to Islamic prophet **Muhammad**) and all the Prophets of Islam. The **term caliphate is often applied to successions of Muslim empires that have existed in the Middle East and Southwest Asia**. Conceptually the caliphate represents the political unity of the entire community of Muslim faithful (the *ummah*) ruled by a single caliph. In theory, the organization of a caliphate should be a constitutional **theocracy** (under the **Constitution of Medina**), which means that the **head of state**, the **Caliph**, and other officials are representatives of the people and of **Islam** and must govern according to constitutional and **religious law** (**Sharia**) (emphasis added)” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate> - introductory material).

MESSAGES FOR THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR

Messiah Yeshua tells John to write about “the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things”:

“Write therefore the things which you have seen, and **the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things**” (Revelation 1:19, emphasis added).

“Write therefore ... the things which are” –

Messiah Yeshua gives John messages for the Seven Churches located in Asia Minor (today Turkey): Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Revelation 2 and 3). The messages were specific to what was happening at that time in these churches. The messages continue to have application to churches from the past to the present.

THE SEALS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Seals of the Book of Revelation relate to historical events concerning the Roman Empire, the 6th Head of the Beast, from its height to its decline and fall.

We must always keep in mind that Israel, specifically Jerusalem, is the focal point of Biblical prophecy. Therefore, the Seals and Trumpets describe major historical events directly affecting the Land of Israel and Jerusalem. All prophetic history centers on Jerusalem and the Heads of the Beast represent the great empires that ruled over Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.

We have previously shown that the 6th Head of the Beast from the Sea, described in Revelation Chapters 13 and 17, represents the Roman Empire. The “healed” 6th Head represents Papal Rome (Revelation 13:3-8). The Beast from the Earth represents the Christian Roman Empire; the Two Horns of the Beast from the Earth represent Rome of the Western Roman Empire, and Constantinople of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire (Revelation 13:11-18). The Woman

that sits on the Beast represents the city of Rome; the Great Harlot represents Papal Rome (Revelation 17:1-7; 18). The Ten Horns of the Beast represent Ten Germanic Kingdoms that conquered the lands of the Western Roman Empire and gave rise to the Western European nations of today (Revelation 17:12-17). (See Part 5 “The Beasts of Revelation & Daniel” for a detailed study of these subjects.)

THE HEADS OF THE BEAST FROM THE SEA – THE GREAT EMPIRES THAT RULED JERUSALEM AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL

As previously detailed in this study, the eight heads of the Beast from the Sea (Revelation 13 and 17) represent the following empires:

1. Egyptian Empire
2. Assyrian Empire
3. Babylonian Empire
4. Persian Empire
5. Greek Empire
6. Roman Empire (Early Roman Empire; later Western Roman Empire with Rome as its capital)
7. Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman Empire with Constantinople as its capital)
8. Islamic Empire(s)

The word “beast” in both Revelation and Daniel never represents a man but always represents a great kingdom or empire. “Heads” and “mountains” represent great kingdoms or empires of the Mediterranean and Middle East that directly influenced and ruled over Israel, the focal point of Biblical prophecy and God’s plan of redemption. The word translated “king” also represents great kingdoms or empires.

“Here is the mind which has wisdom. The **seven heads are seven mountains** on which the woman sits, and they are **seven kings [kingdoms]; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come**; and when he [it] comes, he [it] must remain a little while. And the **beast which was and is not**, is himself [itself] also an

eighth, and is one of the seven, and he [it] goes to destruction” (Revelation 17:9-11, emphasis added).

“five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” (Revelation 17:10) –

At the time the apostle John recorded his visions, the first five empires had fallen (Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece); one existed: Rome; and the 7th was yet to come: the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire. The 8th would also rise after the 7th (Revelation 17:11).

At the time John had the vision of the Beast from the Sea, Rome ruled the world of the Mediterranean Sea. The Romans called the Mediterranean Sea “Mare Nostrum”, meaning “Our Sea”.⁶ We can therefore understand the prophetic picture of the Sea representing the Mediterranean Sea, and the Beast representing Rome, which had conquered lands of the previous empires, represented by the first five heads. Thereafter, the two heads that followed the 6th Head of Rome represented empires also rising out of the Mediterranean world – Constantinople and the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire (7th Head), which eventually fell to the Islamic Ottoman Empire (8th Head). Today, Constantinople is known by its Islamic name, Istanbul.

As previously shown, the Beast from the Earth represents the Christian Roman Empire (see Part 5 “The Beasts of Revelation and Daniel”). This image is also very fitting because, as Adam was made from the dust of the Earth, so too can humanity be represented by the earth. As Rome ruled the Mediterranean world, the Christian Roman Empire ruled all the various peoples of the Mediterranean world, uniting them in one apostate (paganized) Christian Roman religion.

The Woman that sits on the Beast (the Roman Empire) represents the city of Rome (Revelation 17:18). It is interesting to note that the city of Rome was named after the goddess, Roma. Rome conquered and ruled the territories of the previous empires. This is why Rome is described as “sitting on seven heads or mountains” (“head” or “mountain” representing a kingdom or empire) (Revelation 17:9-10). Note that Rome is depicted as sitting on or ruling over seven, not

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mare_Nostrum (introductory material; section “Roman usage”).

eight, heads or empires. This shows that Rome never ruled over the 8th Head, which represents the Islamic Empires that conquered much of the Roman world, especially in the east.

After the Fall of Rome (AD 476), marking the end of the Roman Empire in the West, Papal Rome rose to power, as represented by the Healed 6th Head of the Beast (Revelation 13:3).

For details of the above summary overview, see Part 5 “The Beasts of Revelation & Daniel” posted for free under “A New Look at the Books of Revelation & Daniel End-Time Prophecies” (www.messengers-of-messiah.org).

THE EMPIRES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST (MAPS)

Egyptian Empire – 1st Head of the Beast

Map of maximum territorial extent of ancient Egypt (about 1450 BC)⁷

Key point in Israel’s History: Israelite Exodus from Egypt (about 1450 BC)

(Map next page)

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Egypt_1450_BC.svg Map of the Middle East 1450 BC (by Andrei Nacu).

[illegible]

Assyrian Empire – 2nd Head of the Beast (934–609 BC)

Key events in Israel's history:

Northern Kingdom of Israel conquered by the Assyrian Empire (723-722 BC)

Map of the Assyrian Empire (824 BC & 671 BC)⁸



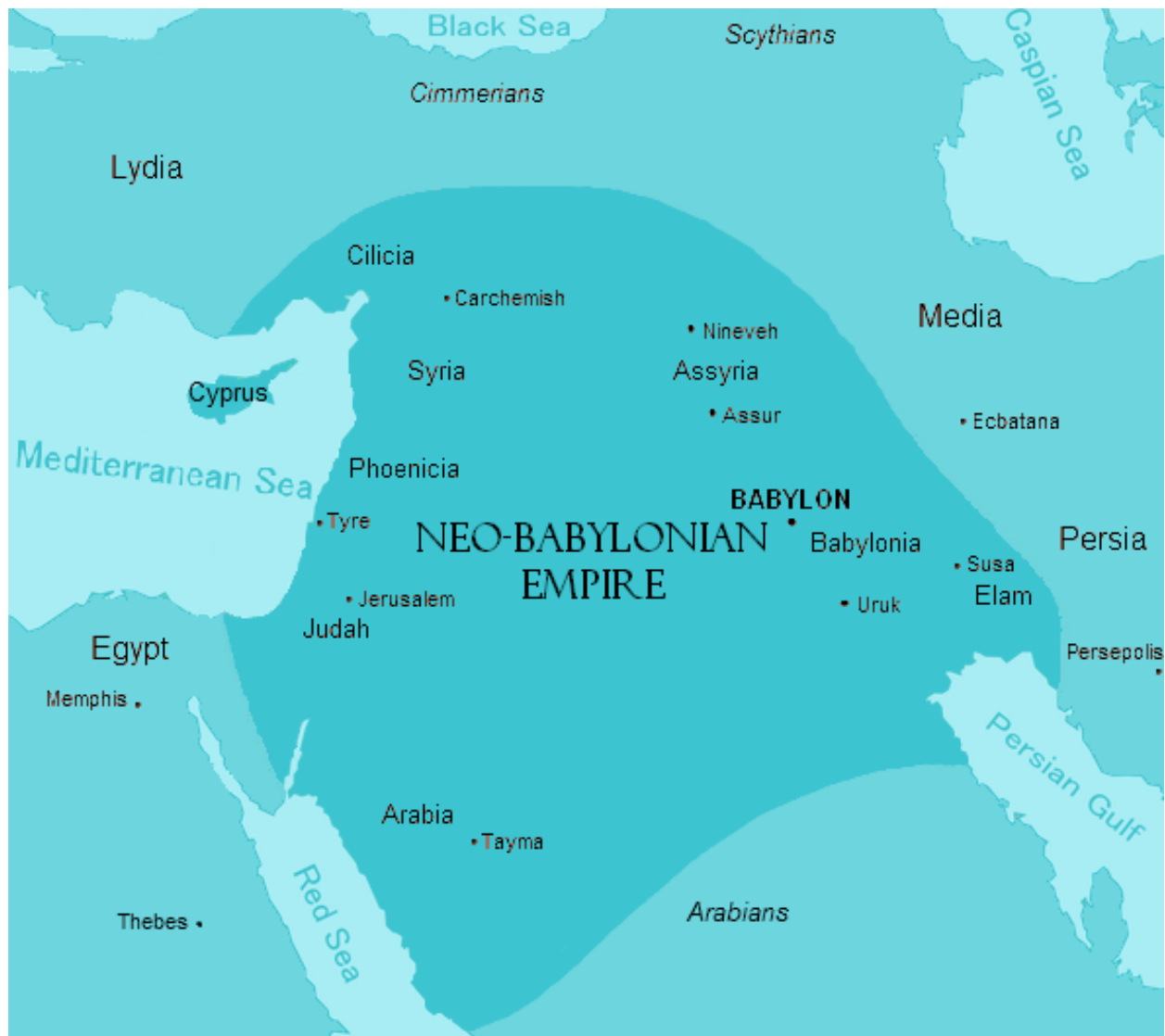
⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Assyria.png

Babylonian Empire – 3rd Head of the Beast (626–539 BC)

Key events in Israel's history:

Land of Israel came under Babylonian control (605 BC), Daniel taken to Babylon with first group of hostages. Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple (587 BC)

Map of Babylonian Empire⁹



⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Neo-Babylonian_Empire.png

Persian Empire – 4th Head of the Beast (550–330 BC)

The Persian Empire is called the First Persian Empire or the Achaemenid Empire (550 BC–330 BC) to distinguish it from the later Sassanid Empire (AD 224-651).

Key events in Israel's history:

Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon (539 BC)

Cyrus' decree for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and rebuilding of the Temple (538 BC)

Second Temple completed and dedicated on Passover in the sixth year of Darius I (516-515 BC)

Map of Persian Achaemenid Empire at the time of Darius the Great and Xerxes¹⁰

Darius the Great (550-486 BC) – ruled the empire at its peak territorial expansion¹¹

Xerxes the Great (519-465 BC) – Persian king (Ahasuerus) who married Esther¹²



¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_achaemenid_empire_en.png

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius_I

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerxes_I

Greek Empire – 5th Head of the Beast (334–323 BC)

The Greek Empire of Alexander the Great 334-323 BC¹³

As the map shows, Alexander conquered the Persian Empire.



Division of Alexander's Empire

After Alexander's death in Babylon in 323 BC, his empire was divided into four kingdoms – Egypt; Syria and Babylon; Asia Minor; and Macedonia (Daniel 7:6; 8:22; 11:4). The Ptolemaic Kingdom (Egypt) and Seleucid Kingdom (Syria and Babylon) fought each other for control of Jerusalem and the Land of Israel (Daniel 11:5-32).

Key events in Israel's history:

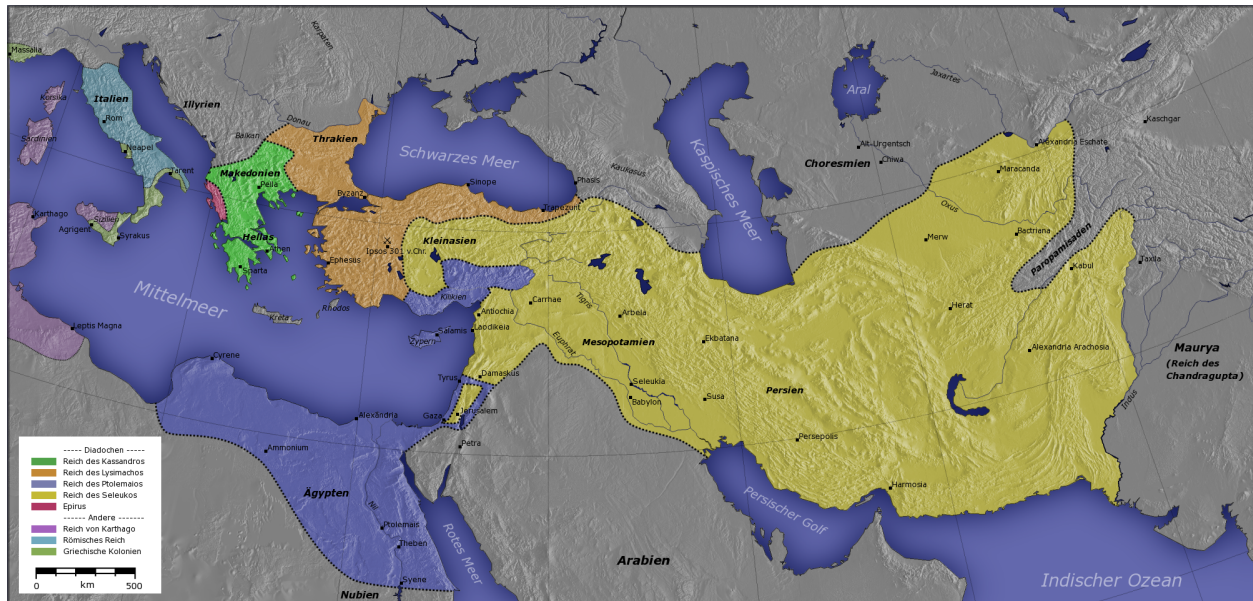
Seleucid king Antiochus IV forbade Biblical religious practice and stopped the daily sacrifice for three years and six months (Daniel 8:9-14). The Jewish forces in the Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BC) succeeded in defeating Antiochus' forces and the Jerusalem Temple was cleansed and rededicated three years to the day after its desecration.¹⁴ Hanukkah commemorates the miracle

¹³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MacedonEmpire.jpg>

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah> (section "Story of Hanukkah - Background").

of one-day's supply of consecrated oil to light the Temple menorah lasting eight days until a new supply could be made.

Map showing four kingdoms of Alexander's divided Greek Empire: Egypt (Blue); Syria and Babylon (Yellow); Asia Minor (Orange); Macedonia (Green).¹⁵



¹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Diadochen1.png>

Roman Empire – 6th Head of the Beast (27 BC–AD 476)

Key events in Israel's history:

Land of Israel came under Roman control 63 BC

Yeshua born 3 BC; crucifixion AD 31

Romans destroyed the Second Temple AD 70

Map of the Roman Empire at its greatest extent in AD 117 under Roman Emperor Trajan – Roman Empire (red); Clients of Rome (pink).¹⁶ (Note: A client state was one that was made subservient but not conquered and absorbed by the Roman Empire.)¹⁷



¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_Empire_Trajan_117AD.png

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Client_state (section “Persia, Greece, and Rome”).

Byzantine Empire – 7th Head of the Beast (AD 330-1453)

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, the Roman Empire in the East continued for another thousand years. The Eastern Roman Empire is also called the Byzantine Empire (c. 330–1204; 1261-1453). (Constantinople was conquered by the Roman Catholic Crusaders in 1204; Constantinople was regained by the Byzantines in 1261).

Land of Israel under Byzantine Empire control AD 324-638

Map of the Byzantine Empire at its greatest extent in AD 555 under Justinian the Great.¹⁸



Map showing Byzantine Empire AD 650.¹⁹ Shows rise of the Arab Caliphate/Islamic Empire



¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Justinian555AD.png>

¹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Byzantiumby650AD.svg>

Islamic Empire(s) – 8th Head of the Beast

Various Islamic Empires ruled in the Middle East and parts of the Mediterranean world. The main Islamic Empires were: Rashidun Caliphate (632-661); Umayyad Caliphate (661-750); Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258); and Ottoman Caliphate (1517-1924).²⁰

Key events in the history of Israel:

Jerusalem conquered by Islam (638)

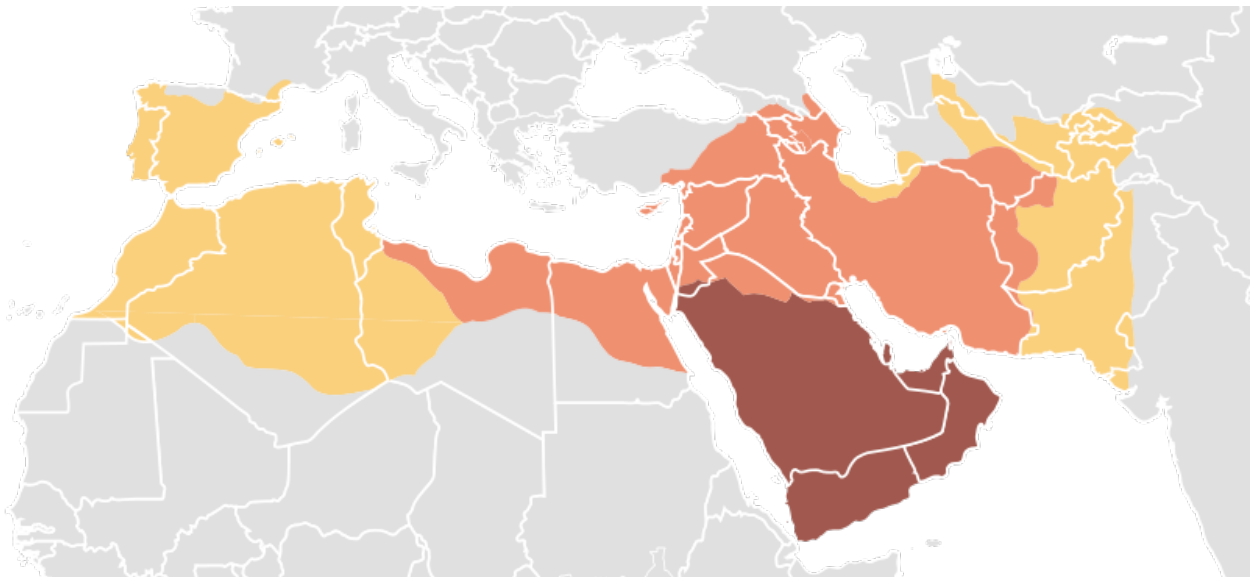
Dome of the Rock built on Temple Mount (completed 691)

Map: The Caliphate, 622–750²¹

Expansion under Muhammad, 622-632 (dark reddish-brown)

Expansion during the Rashidun Caliphs, 632-661 (yellowish-pink)

Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate, 661-750 (yellow)



²⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate>

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_expansion_of_Caliphate.svg

The Ottoman Empire (1299-1923), the last and the greatest Islamic Empire, ruled much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa during the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire (1453). The Ottoman Empire ruled Jerusalem for 400 hundred years (1516-1917)

Map of the Ottoman Empire at its greatest extent in 1590's²²

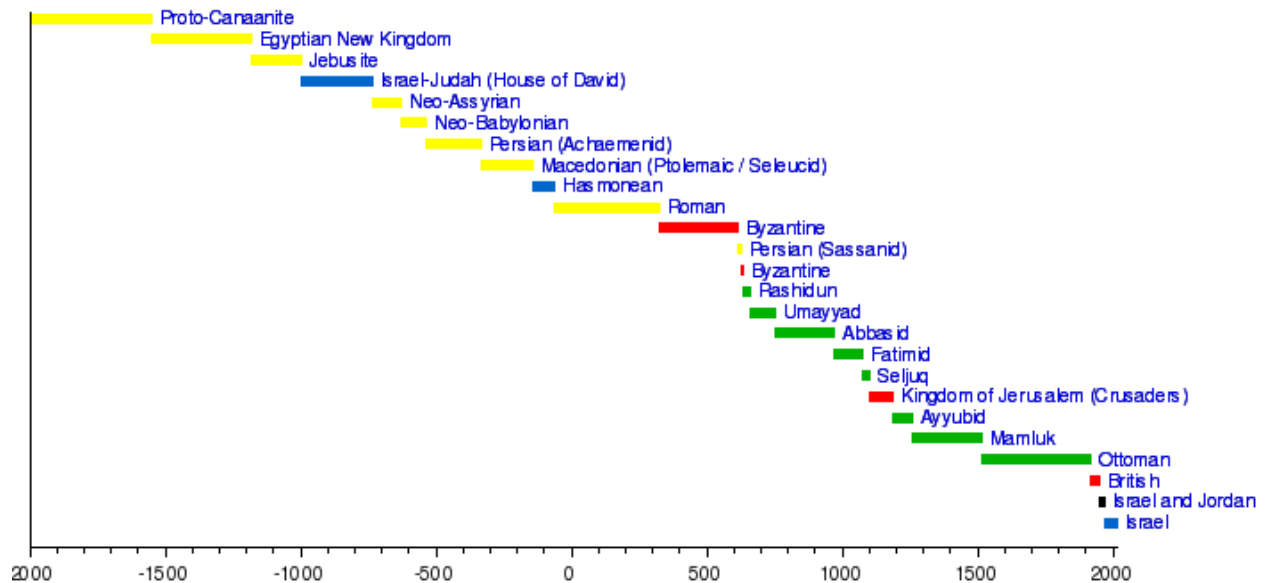


ISRAEL'S HISTORY REVEALS THE IDENTITY OF THE HEADS OF THE BEAST

The fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is to be found in the history of prophetic events. Israel, in particular Jerusalem, is at the center of Biblical prophetic events. Therefore, in order to understand the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, we must know the history of Israel and Jerusalem. Confirmation that we have correctly identified the Heads of the Beast from the Sea is found in the historical record of the great empires that ruled Jerusalem.

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ottoman_Empire_16-17th_century.jpg

Overview of Jerusalem's Historical Periods²³



Wikipedia's "Overview of Jerusalem's Historical Periods" shows the 8 Heads of the Beast:

- 1st Egyptian Empire (Egyptian New Kingdom)
- 2nd Assyrian Empire (Neo-Assyrian)
- 3rd Babylonian Empire (Neo-Babylonian)
- 4th Persian Empire (Achaemenid)
- 5th Greek Empire (Macedonian: Ptolemaic/Seleucid)
- 6th Roman Empire (Roman Papacy—healed 6th Head: Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem)
- 7th Byzantine Empire
- 8th Islamic Empire(s) (Series of Islamic empires: Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Seljuq, Ayyubid, Mamluk, Ottoman)

Israel's History and the Heads of the Beast

c. 1550-1400 BC Egyptian New Kingdom (1st Head of the Beast) expands into Land of Canaan (Israel); Jerusalem becomes a vassal to Egypt.²⁴

²³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem> (chart: "Overview of Jerusalem's historical periods").

c. 1450 BC	Exodus from Egypt (1 st Head of the Beast)
723-722 BC	Israel conquered by Assyria (2 nd Head of the Beast) Kingdom of Israel (10 Northern Tribes) conquered by Assyria.
587 BC	Judah conquered by Babylonia (3 rd Head of the Beast) Kingdom of Judah conquered by Babylonia; First Temple destroyed.
538-333 BC	Persian Period (4 th Head of the Beast)
333-63 BC	Hellenistic (Greek) Period (5 th Head of the Beast)
63 BC–324	Pagan Roman Period (6 th Head of the Beast)
70	Romans capture Jerusalem; destroy Temple
324-638	Byzantine Period (7 th Head of the Beast)
638-1099	Arab Period (8 th Head of the Beast)
1099-1187	Crusader Period (Roman Papacy is the healed 6 th Head of the Beast)
1260-1516	Mamluke Period (8 th Head of the Beast)
1516-1917	Ottoman Period (8 th Head of the Beast)
1917-1948	British Mandate

In 1917, Jerusalem surrendered to British General Allenby. In 1948, Jerusalem became a divided city – East Jerusalem, including Temple Mount and Mount of Olives, remained under Islamic control, as did Judea and Samaria.

1948	Nation of Israel reborn (Isaiah 66:8)
1967	Six-Day War – Jerusalem reunited; Judea & Samaria restored

The Temple Mount is technically under Israeli sovereignty but in actuality is controlled by the Islamic administration that governs the Temple Mount.

Jerusalem and Israel remain at the center of the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. To this day, the nations and religions that rose out of the Roman Empire want to control Jerusalem: Islam (8th Head), Roman Papacy (healed 6th Head), and Greek/Eastern Orthodoxy (7th Head).

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Jerusalem (section “Ancient Period”).

The Image of Daniel Toes of Iron and Clay represent today's nations originating out of the Roman Empire (Iron) and the Islamic Empires (Clay) (Daniel 2). Soon the kingdoms (nations) of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord (Daniel 2:44-45; Revelation 11:15).

OVERVIEW OF SEALS 1–5

The first four Seals reveal a prophetic picture of the major historical events dealing with the 6th Head of the Beast from the Sea – the Pagan Roman Empire – from its rise in power to the greatest extent of its borders, followed by its decline due to war, economic depression, food shortages, and disease. The Fifth Seal reveals a prophetic picture of believers persecuted and martyred for their faith in Messiah Yeshua by the Pagan Roman Empire.

Remember that the Seventy Weeks Prophecy of Daniel prophesies the destruction not only of Jerusalem but also of Rome:

“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and **the [Roman] people of the prince [Titus] who is to come will destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary [Temple]**. And its [Jerusalem's] end will come with a flood [of Roman soldiers]; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he [Messiah Yeshua] will make a firm covenant [the New Covenant] with the many ~~for~~ [“for” not in the original text] one week [70th Week], but in the middle of the week [Passover AD 31] he [Yeshua] will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering [by His once-for-all-time sin-atonement sacrifice]; and on the wing of abominations will come one [Rome] who makes desolate [destroys Jerusalem], even until **a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one [Rome] who makes [Jerusalem] desolate**” (Daniel 9:26-27, emphasis added).

The vision of the Seals shown to John is a prophetic description of the rise of Rome to its greatest height of power, followed by its decline and fall. The historical events described began to be fulfilled a short time after John's visions:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ [Yeshua HaMashiach – Yeshua the Messiah], which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, **the things which must shortly take place**; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John (Revelation 1:1, emphasis added).

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear **the words of the prophecy**, and heed the things which are written in it; **for the time is near** (Revelation 1:3, emphasis added).

Let's look at the big prophetic picture for the first five Seals before we go into a detailed study of each one.

FIRST SEAL – WHITE HORSE

The White Horse symbolizes conquest:

And I saw when the Lamb [Messiah Yeshua] broke **one of the seven seals**, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." And I looked, and behold, a **white horse**, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and **he went out conquering**, and to conquer (Revelation 6:1-2, emphasis added).

The rider of the White Horse represents Roman Emperor Trajan, whose conquests extended the borders of the Roman Empire to their greatest extent (AD 117).

SECOND SEAL – RED HORSE

The Red Horse symbolizes war:

And when He [Messiah Yeshua] broke the **second seal**, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." And another, a **red horse**, went out; and to him who sat

on it, it was granted to **take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another**; and a great sword was given to him (Revelation 6:3-4, emphasis added).

During the Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235-284), the Roman Empire disintegrated and almost collapsed as a result of barbarian invasions and civil war. This began the great decline that eventually led to the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West.

THIRD SEAL – BLACK HORSE

The Black Horse symbolizes the break down of the economic system:

And when He broke the **third seal**, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a **black horse**; and he who sat on it had a **pair of scales** in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine (Revelation 6:5-6, emphasis added).”

As a result of the political instability of the Third Century, the Roman Empire’s vast internal trade network broke down and out-of-control inflation nearly collapsed the monetary system.²⁵

FOURTH SEAL – PALE HORSE

The Pale Horse symbolizes death:

When He opened the **fourth seal**, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a **pale horse**. And the name of him who sat on it was **Death**, and Hades followed with him. And power was

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (sections “Economic impact” and “Breakdown of internal trade network”).

given to them over a fourth of the earth, **to kill with sword, with hunger, with death**, and by the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:7-8, NKJV, emphasis added).

During the Third Century period of decline, the Roman Empire was greatly depopulated by wars (“sword”) and food shortages that weakened the population making them vulnerable to disease. Depopulation would have resulted in encroachment of wild animals, adding to human mortality.

The horse symbolizing death is described by the Greek word *chloros* (Strong’s #5515), meaning “pale green”²⁶; translated “pale” in the King James Version, New King James Version, and New International Version, and “ashen” in the New American Standard Bible. The green color conveyed by the word fits the description of a corpse undergoing the process of decay:

Putrefaction follows a predetermined timetable in nature and after the first 36 hours the neck, the abdomen, the shoulders and the head begin to turn a discoloured **green**. ...

As the process reaches its conclusion, the body will now be almost black-**green** ... (emphasis added).²⁷

FIFTH SEAL – MARTYRS

The Fifth Seal shows persecution and martyrdom of believers in Messiah Yeshua by the Pagan Roman Empire:

And when He broke the **fifth seal**, I saw underneath the altar the **souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained**; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our

²⁶ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1984, 1996), p. 456.

²⁷ <http://www.exploreforensics.co.uk/the-rate-of-decay-in-a-corpse.html>

blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also (Revelation 6:9-11, emphasis added).

There was a series of persecutions, the worst under Diocletian, called the Great Persecution:

And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of **the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14, emphasis added).

Persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire ended with the Edict of Milan (313), under Emperor Constantine.²⁸

HISTORICAL DETAIL OF SEALS 1-5

In Revelation 1:1, Yeshua told John He would reveal “the things which must shortly take place”, meaning the prophecies would begin to be fulfilled soon after they were given. History validates this interpretation. The prophetic events shown by the Seals began to take place soon after the time of John’s vision (about AD 95). The First Seal describes events that took place during the reign of Roman Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117).

FIRST SEAL – WHITE HORSE – CONQUEST

The First Seal describes a great conqueror riding a white horse:

And I saw when the Lamb [Messiah Yeshua] broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, **a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and**

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Milan

a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer
(Revelation 6:1-2, emphasis added).

The conqueror is described as having a crown, signifying a ruler or emperor. This rider is in contrast to the Lord Himself, who also rides a white horse when He comes out of Heaven at His Second Coming to destroy the enemies of Israel (Revelation 19:11-21):

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war
(Revelation 19:11).

Rome's Greatest Geographic Expansion under Trajan

Roman Emperor Trajan fits the prophetic picture of the conqueror on the white horse:

Officially declared by the [senate](#) as *optimus princeps* ("the best emperor"), Trajan is remembered as a **successful soldier-emperor who presided over the greatest military expansion in Roman history, leading the empire to attain its maximum territorial extent by the time of his death** (emphasis added).²⁹

As the Roman emperor who led the “greatest military expansion in Roman history” that resulted in the empire reaching its “maximum territorial extent”, Trajan certainly fits the prophetic description of the great conqueror riding the white horse.

Early in his reign, he annexed the [Nabataean kingdom](#), creating the province of [Arabia Petraea](#). His conquest of [Dacia](#) enriched the empire greatly — the new province possessed many valuable gold mines. ...

²⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trajan> (introductory material).

His war against the [Parthian Empire](#) ended with the attack of the capital [Ctesiphon](#) and the annexation of [Armenia](#) and [Mesopotamia](#). His campaigns expanded the Roman Empire to its greatest territorial extent.³⁰

The map below shows the Roman Empire at its height under Trajan (AD 117).³¹



“he who sat on it [the white horse] had a bow” –

As a military commander, Trajan is best known for his conquests in the Near East, including Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Arabia.³² In this regard, the reference to the rider having a bow may be of prophetic significance:

³⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trajan> (introductory material).

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_Empire_Trajan_117AD.png

³² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trajan> (introductory material; section “Conquest of Dacia”).

And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and **he who sat on it had a bow**; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer (Revelation 6:2, emphasis added).

Horse archers became an essential component of the Roman army to fight enemies in the Eastern portions of the Roman world:

While mercenary foot archers already served with the Roman republican army, **horse archers were only introduced after the Romans came into conflict with eastern factions that relied heavily on mounted archery** in the 1st century BCE. Most notably the **Parthians** which mounted archers were decisive for **Crassus** disastrous defeat in the **Battle of Carrhae**. **In the early 1st century CE horse archers were already in widespread use** and even supported Roman campaigns against the Germanic tribes in northern Europe[3] ...

After the fall of the Western empire, **Eastern Roman armies maintained their tradition of horse archery for centuries** (emphasis added).³³

Trajan's Reign during the Jewish-Roman Kitos War

What also makes Trajan prophetically noteworthy is that he was emperor during the Jewish rebellion known as the Kitos War (115-117), the second of the Jewish-Roman wars, involving major revolts of Jews throughout Cyprus, Libya, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Judea, and Syria.³⁴

³³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sagittarii>

³⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitos_War

The first Jewish-Roman war (AD 66-70) resulted in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans, fulfilling Daniel's Seventy Weeks Prophecy relating to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (Daniel 9:26). The third Jewish-Roman war involved the rebellion of Jews in Judea against the Roman Empire (Bar Kokhba revolt – AD 132-136).

See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_Kokhba_revolt

Trajan's Response to Christians

In addition, Trajan dealt with the issue of believers in Messiah Yeshua in Asia Minor (Turkey). Around AD 112, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, wrote to Emperor Trajan for guidance in dealing with those accused of being Christians.³⁵

Trajan's response to Pliny was as follows:

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished [by execution], with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.³⁶

We can see from Trajan's response that there was no official policy on how to deal with believers. In fact, Trajan says they were "not to be sought out". However, if they were brought before officials and refused to deny Yeshua and worship the pagan gods, there were to be executed.

Trajan's Birth During the Feast of Tabernacles

It is interesting to note that Trajan was born on 18 September 53 (16th of Tishri), during the Feast of Tabernacles/Sukkot (15th – 21st of Tishri). As Biblical prophetic events follow the Biblical Calendar and Biblical Holy Days, this may be of prophetic significance.

³⁵ See Pliny's letter at <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/texts/pliny.html>
See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Younger_on_Christians (section "Pliny's Letter to Trajan").

³⁶ <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/texts/pliny.html>

SECOND SEAL – RED HORSE – WAR

The Red Horse symbolizes war:

And when He [Messiah Yeshua] broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.” And another, **a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth**, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him (Revelation 6:3-4, emphasis added).

The Second Seal is a prophetic picture of warfare during the Crisis of the Third Century.³⁷ At this time, the Roman Empire disintegrated and almost collapsed as a result of barbarian invasions and civil war. This began the great decline that eventually led to the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West.

WARFARE DURING THE CRISIS OF THE THIRD CENTURY

Although the Roman Empire reached the height of its territorial expansion at the beginning of the Second Century under Emperor Trajan, it almost collapsed in the Third Century:

The Crisis of the Third Century, also known as Military Anarchy or the Imperial Crisis, (AD 235–284) was a period in which the Roman Empire nearly collapsed under the combined pressures of invasion, civil war, plague, and economic depression. The Crisis began with the **assassination** of Emperor **Alexander Severus** at the hands of his own troops, initiating a fifty-year period in which 20–25 claimants to the title of Emperor, mostly prominent **Roman army generals**, assumed imperial power over all or part of the Empire (emphasis added).³⁸

³⁷ First Century: 1-100; Second Century: 101-200; Third Century: 201-300.

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (introductory material).

KEY POINT: The Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235-284) was a period of such great political, economic, and social instability that the Roman Empire almost collapsed “under the combined pressures of **invasion, civil war, plague, and economic depression**” – EXACTLY according to the Biblical prophecies of the Second, Third, and Fourth Seals:

1. The **Red Horse** of the Second Seal symbolizes **war** during the Crisis of the Third Century: wars of foreign invaders and civil wars.
2. The **Black Horse** of the Third Seal symbolizes **economic depression and inflation** during the Third Century.
3. The **Pale Horse** of the Fourth Seal symbolizes **death** from **plague (disease), war and food shortages** that vastly depopulated the Pagan Roman Empire.

This period of wars of invasion and civil wars is detailed in Wikipedia’s article “Crisis of the Third Century”:

The situation of the Roman Empire became dire in AD 235, when the emperor [Alexander Severus](#) was murdered by his own troops. Many [Roman legions](#) had been defeated during a campaign against [Germanic peoples](#) **raiding across the borders**, while the emperor was focused primarily on the **dangers from the [Sassanid Persian Empire](#)**. Leading his troops personally, Alexander Severus resorted to diplomacy and paying tribute in an attempt to pacify the [Germanic chieftains](#) quickly. According to [Herodian](#) this cost him the respect of his troops, who may have felt they should be punishing the tribes who were intruding on Rome's territory.[2]

In the years following the emperor's death, **generals of the Roman army fought each other for control of the Empire** and neglected their duties in preventing invasions from foreigners. Provincials became victims of frequent **raids by foreign tribes, such as the [Carprians](#), [Goths](#), [Vandals](#), and [Alamanni](#)**, along the Rhine and Danube Rivers in the western part of the Empire, as well as **attacks from [Sassanids](#)** in the eastern part of the Empire. Additionally, in 251, the [Plague](#)

of Cyprian (possibly smallpox) [see Fourth Seal of Revelation], broke out, causing large-scale mortality which may have seriously affected the ability of the Empire to defend itself.

By 258, the Roman Empire broke up into three competing states. The Roman provinces of Gaul, Britain and Hispania broke off to form the Gallic Empire and, two years later in 260, the eastern provinces of Syria, Palestine and Aegyptus became independent as the Palmyrene Empire, leaving the remaining Italian-centered Roman Empire-proper in the middle.

An invasion by a vast host of Goths was beaten back at the Battle of Naissus in 269. This victory was significant as the turning point of the crisis, when a series of tough, energetic soldier-emperors took power. Victories by the emperor Claudius II Gothicus over the next two years drove back the Alamanni and recovered Hispania from the Gallic Empire. When Claudius died in 270 of the plague, Aurelian, who had commanded the cavalry at Naissus, succeeded him as the emperor and continued the restoration of the Empire.

Aurelian reigned (270–275) through the worst of the crisis, defeating the Vandals, the Visigoths, the Palmyrenes, the Persians, and then the remainder of the Gallic Empire. By late 274, the Roman Empire was reunited into a single entity, and the frontier troops were back in place. More than a century passed before Rome again lost military ascendancy over its external enemies. However, dozens of formerly thriving cities, especially in the Western Empire, had been ruined, their populations dispersed and, with the breakdown of the economic system [see Third Seal of Revelation], could not be rebuilt. Major cities and towns, even Rome itself, had not needed fortifications for many centuries; many now surrounded themselves with thick walls.

Finally, although Aurelian had played a significant role in restoring the Empire's borders from external threat, more fundamental problems remained. In particular,

the right of succession had never been clearly defined in the Roman Empire, leading to **continuous civil wars as competing factions in the military, Senate and other parties** put forward their favoured candidate for emperor. Another issue was the sheer size of the Empire, which made it difficult for a single autocratic ruler to effectively manage multiple threats at the same time. These continuing problems would be radically addressed by [Diocletian](#), allowing the Empire to survive in the West for over a century, and in the East for over a millennium (emphasis added).³⁹

As stated above, during the Crisis of the Third Century, the Roman Empire broke up into three independent states.

Map of Ancient Rome 271 AD⁴⁰ (next page)



³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section “History”).

⁴⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Ancient_Rome_271_AD.svg

By 258–260, the Empire split into three competing states: the **Gallic Empire**, including the **Roman provinces** of **Gaul**, **Britannia** and (briefly) **Hispania**; the **Palmyrene Empire**, including the eastern provinces of **Syria Palaestina** and **Aegyptus**; and the Italian-centered and independent Roman Empire, proper, between them. Later, **Aurelian** (270–275) reunited the empire; the Crisis ended with the ascension and reforms of **Diocletian** in 284.⁴¹

The Third Century was a prophetic turning point in the history of the Roman Empire:

The Crisis resulted in such profound changes in the Empire's institutions, society, economic life and, eventually, **religion**, that it is increasingly seen by most historians as defining the transition between the **historical periods** of **classical antiquity** and **late antiquity**.^[1]⁴²

THIRD SEAL – BLACK HORSE – ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

Let's restate the key point from above:

KEY POINT: The Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235-284) was a period of such great political, economic, and social instability that the Roman Empire almost collapsed “under the combined pressures of **invasion, civil war, plague, and economic depression**” – EXACTLY according to the Biblical prophecies of the Second, Third, and Fourth Seals.

The **Black Horse** of the Third Seal symbolizes **economic depression and inflation** that occurred in the Pagan Roman Empire during the Crisis of the Third Century:

And when He broke the **third seal**, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a **black horse**; and he who sat on it had a **pair of scales** in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four

⁴¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (introductory material).

⁴² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (introductory material).

living creatures saying, “**A quart⁴³ of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius**; and do not harm the oil and the wine” (Revelation 6:5-6, emphasis added).

DEVALUATION OF THE DENARIUS

The denarius was a common coin used throughout the Roman Empire:

In the [Roman currency](#) system, the **denarius** (/dɪˈnɛərɪəs/ *di-nair-i-əs*; plural: denarii /dɪˈnɛərɪi/ *di-nair-i-eye*) was a small [silver coin](#) first minted about 211 BC during the Second Punic War. It **became the most common coin produced for circulation but was slowly debased in weight and silver content until its replacement by the double denarius, called the [antoninianus](#), early in the 3rd century AD. ...**

The last issuance of this coin occurred in bronze form by [Aurelian](#), between AD 270 and 275, and in the first years of the reign of [Diocletian](#) (emphasis added).⁴⁴

A denarius was a day’s wage for a common laborer during the time Rome ruled Judea:

“And when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard” (Matthew 20:2).

Historians confirm that a denarius was the daily wage for the common laborer or soldier throughout the Roman Empire at that time:

Classical historians often say that in the late [Roman Republic](#) and early [Roman Empire](#) the daily wage for an unskilled laborer and common soldier was 1 denarius ...⁴⁵

⁴³ The Greek word *choenix* (Strong’s #5518) refers to a dry measure, almost equal to a quart.

⁴⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denarius> (introductory material; section “History”).

ECONOMIC DEPRESSION AND INFLATION IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The Third Seal describes the economic condition of high inflation, resulting in the high cost of grain, the fundamental food staple: **“A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius”** (Revelation 6:6). This means a day’s pay was required to purchase a one-day supply of wheat for one person. Barley, the cheaper grain, was one-third the cost.

What was prophesied by the Third Seal occurred during the Crisis of the Third Century:

Internally, **the empire faced hyperinflation caused by years of coinage devaluation.** This had started earlier under the **Severan emperors** who enlarged the army ... and doubled the legionaries' base pay. As each of the short-lived emperors took power, he needed ways to raise money quickly to pay the military's "accession bonus" and the easiest way to do so was by simply cutting the silver in coins and adding less valuable metals like bronze or copper.

This had the predictable effect of causing runaway inflation, and by the time Diocletian came to power, the old coinage of the Roman Empire had nearly collapsed. Some taxes were collected in kind [for example, agricultural products]. ... **Real values** continued to be figured in gold coinage, but **the silver coin, the denarius, used for 300 years, was gone ... This currency had almost no value by the end of the third century,** and trade was carried out without retail coinage (emphasis added).⁴⁶

A number of factors contributed to the debasement of the denarius:

Although the denarius remained the backbone of the Roman economy from its introduction in 211 BC until it ceased to be normally minted in the middle of the third century, the purity and weight of the coin slowly, but inexorably,

⁴⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denarius> (section “Comparisons and silver content”).

⁴⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section “Economic impact”).

decreased. The problem of debasement in the Roman economy appears to be pervasive, although the severity of the debasement often paralleled the strength or weakness of the Empire. While it is not clear why debasement was such a common occurrence for the Romans, it's believed that it was caused by several factors, including a lack of precious metals, inadequacies in state finances, and inflation. When introduced, the denarius contained nearly pure silver at a theoretical weight of approximately 4.5 [grams](#).

The theoretical standard, although not usually met in practice, remained fairly stable throughout the Republic, with the notable exception of times of war. **The large number of coins required to raise an army and pay for supplies often necessitated the debasement of the coinage.** [Note: Here we see a connection between the Second Seal representing War and the Third Seal representing Economic Decline/Depression/Inflation] ...

The denarius continued to decline slowly in purity, with a notable reduction instituted by [Septimius Severus](#). This was followed by the introduction of a double denarius piece, differentiated from the denarius by the [radiate crown](#) worn by the emperor. The coin is commonly called the [antoninianus](#) by numismatists after the emperor Caracalla, who introduced the coin in [sic] early in 215. Although nominally valued at two denarii, the antoninianus never contained more than 1.6 times the amount of silver of the denarius. The profit of minting a coin valued at two denarii, but weighing only about one and a half times as much is obvious; the reaction to these coins by the public is unknown. **As the number of antoniniani minted increased, the number of denarii minted decreased, until the denarius ceased to be minted in significant quantities by the middle of the third century. Again, coinage saw its greatest debasement during times of war and uncertainty. The second half of the third century was rife with this war and uncertainty,** and the silver content of the antonianus [sic] [antoninianus] fell to only 2%, losing almost an appearance of being silver. During this time the aureus [gold coin worth 25 silver denarii] remained slightly more stable, before it

too became smaller and more base before Diocletian's reform. ...

The exact reason that Roman coinage sustained constant debasement is not known, but the most common theories involve inflation, trade with India, which drained silver from the Mediterranean world, and inadequacies in state finances. ...

Another reason for debasement was lack of raw metal with which to produce coins. Italy itself contains no large or reliable mines for precious metals; therefore the precious metals for coinage had to be obtained elsewhere. The majority of the precious metals that Rome obtained during its period of expansion arrived in the form of war booty from defeated territories, and subsequent tribute and taxes by new-conquered lands. When Rome ceased to expand, the precious metals for coinage then came from newly mined silver, such as from [Greece](#) and [Spain](#), and from melting older coins.

Without a constant influx of precious metals from an outside source, and with the expense of continual wars, it would seem reasonable that coins might be debased to increase the amount that the government could spend. A simpler possible explanation for the debasement of coinage is that it allowed the state to spend more than it had. By decreasing the amount of silver in its coins, Rome could produce more coins and "stretch" its budget. As time progressed, the trade deficit of the west, because of its buying of grain and other commodities, led to a currency drainage in Rome (emphasis added).⁴⁷

BREAKDOWN OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE'S TRADE NETWORK

During the Crisis of the Third Century, not only was the Roman currency devalued but the trade network of the empire was also disrupted:

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_currency (section "Debasement of currency").

One of the most profound and lasting effects of the Crisis of the Third Century was the disruption of Rome's extensive internal trade network. Ever since the [Pax Romana](#), starting with [Augustus](#), the empire's economy had depended in large part on trade between Mediterranean ports and across the extensive road systems to the Empire's interior. Merchants could travel from one end of the empire to the other in relative safety within a few weeks, moving agricultural goods produced in the provinces to the cities, and manufactured goods produced by the great cities of the East to the more rural provinces.

Large estates produced cash crops for export, and used the resulting revenues to import food and urban manufactured goods. This resulted in a great deal of economic interdependence between the empire's inhabitants (emphasis added).
...[3]⁴⁸

With the onset of the Crisis of the Third Century, however, this vast internal trade network broke down. The widespread civil unrest made it no longer safe for merchants to travel as they once had, and the financial crisis that struck made exchange very difficult with the debased currency. This produced profound changes that, in many ways, would foreshadow the very decentralized economic character of the coming [Middle Ages](#).

Large landowners, no longer able to successfully export their crops over long distances, began producing food for subsistence and local barter. Rather than import manufactured goods from the empire's great urban areas, they began to manufacture many goods locally, often on their own estates, thus beginning the self-sufficient "house economy" that would become commonplace in later centuries, reaching its final form in the Middle Ages' [manorialism](#). The common free people of the Roman cities, meanwhile, began to move out into the countryside in search of food and better protection.

⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section "Economic impact").

Made desperate by economic necessity, many of these former city dwellers, as well as many small farmers, were forced to give up hard-earned basic civil rights in order to receive protection from large land-holders. In doing so, they became a half-free class of Roman citizen known as *coloni*. They were tied to the land, and in later Imperial law their status was made hereditary. This provided an early model for *serfdom*, the origins of medieval *feudal society* and of the medieval peasantry.

Even the Roman cities themselves began to change in character. The large, open cities of classical antiquity slowly gave way to the smaller, walled cities that were common in the Middle Ages. These changes were not restricted to the third century, but took place slowly over a long period, and were punctuated with many temporary reversals. However, in spite of extensive reforms by later emperors, **the Roman trade network was never able to fully recover to what it had been during the Pax Romana (27 BC – AD 180) of the first century AD. This economic decline was far more noticeable and important in the western part of the empire, which was also invaded several times during the century.** Hence, the balance of power clearly shifted eastward during this period, as evidenced by the choice of Diocletian to rule from Nicomedia in Asia minor, putting his second in command Maximian in Milan. **This would have considerable impact on the later development of the empire with a richer, more stable eastern empire surviving the end of Roman rule in the west.**

While Imperial revenues fell, Imperial expenses rose sharply. More soldiers, greater proportions of cavalry, and the ruinous expense of walling in cities all added to the toll. Goods and services previously paid for by the government were now demanded in addition to monetary taxes. The steady exodus of both rich and poor from the cities and now-unremunerative professions forced *Diocletian* to use compulsion; most trades were made hereditary, and workers could not legally

leave their jobs or travel elsewhere to seek better-paying ones (emphasis added).⁴⁹

As we can see, the economic and trade crisis of the Third Century led to a transformation of the ancient Roman world in the west:

The decline in commerce between the Imperial provinces put them on a path towards increased insularity [isolation]. Large landowners, who had become more self-sufficient, became less mindful of Rome's central authority, particularly in the Western Empire, and were downright hostile towards its tax collectors. The measure of wealth at this time began to have less to do with wielding urban civil authority and more to do with controlling large agricultural estates in rural regions, since this guaranteed access to the only economic resource of real value — agricultural land and the crops it produced. The common people of the Empire lost economic and political status to the land-holding nobility, and the commercial middle classes waned along with their trade-derived livelihoods. **The Crisis of the Third Century thus marked the beginning of a long gradual process that would transform the ancient world of Classical antiquity into the medieval one of the Early Middle Ages** (emphasis added).⁵⁰

The Third Century was a major turning point in the history of the Roman Empire, in particular in the Western Roman Empire, the 6th Head of the Beast. The Seal prophecies reveal this major transformation of the Beast from the Sea.

“DO NOT HARM THE OIL AND THE WINE”

As previously explained, debasement of the value of the denarius resulted in inflation, increasing the cost of grain, the most basic of food staples in the Roman Empire. The prophecy of the Third Seal also makes reference to olive oil and wine:

⁴⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section “Breakdown of internal trade network”).

⁵⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section “Increased localism”).

And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart⁵¹ of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and **do not harm the oil and the wine**” (Revelation 6:5-6, emphasis added).

Looking at this prophecy from the point of paying taxes in agricultural crops, there may have been more of an incentive to continue to produce olive oil and wine rather than wheat and barley at this time in the Roman Empire. This was because there was apparently less profit in producing grain than in producing wine⁵² and one would assume olive oil as well.

Moreover, the conditions at the time, including the invading Germanic tribes, disrupted agricultural production. Perhaps grain crops were more affected than the olive and grape crops and this situation is also reflected in the prophecy. In this regard, there is evidence that extensive milling facilities in Gaul and Rome ceased to operate at the end of the Third Century:

extensive sets of mills existed in Gaul and Rome at an early date to grind wheat into flour. ... The mills apparently operated from the end of the 1st century AD until about the end of the 3rd century.[14]⁵³

That the grain mills stopped operating about the end of the Third Century seems to show a link to the Crisis of the Third Century. Why did the grain mills in Gaul⁵⁴ and Rome stop operating about the end of 3rd century? Did this result from decreased production of grain, with less grain for the grain mills to process? Was perhaps wine and olive oil processing and production not as affected as grain processing? Even though we do not have definitive answers to these questions, we know

⁵¹ The Greek word *choenix* (Strong's #5518) refers to a dry measure, almost equal to a quart.

⁵² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_agriculture (section “Economics”) – Columella writes in *Res Rustica*: “grain offers little profit compared to wine”.

⁵³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_agriculture (section “Mechanisation”).

⁵⁴ Gaul encompassed “present day France, Luxembourg and Belgium, most of Switzerland, Northern Italy, as well as the parts of the Netherlands and Germany on the west bank of the Rhine” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaul>).

that something happened that did indeed affect grain production/processing during this period of time. But that does not seem to be the case for the production of wine and olive oil.

FOURTH SEAL – PALE HORSE – DEATH

Let's again restate the key point from above:

KEY POINT: The Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235-284) was a period of such great political, economic, and social instability that the Roman Empire almost collapsed “under the combined pressures of **invasion, civil war, plague, and economic depression**” – EXACTLY according to the Biblical prophecies of the Second, Third, and Fourth Seals.

The **Pale Horse** of the Fourth Seal symbolizes **Death**.⁵⁵

When He [Messiah Yeshua] opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a **pale horse**. And the name of him who sat on it was **Death**, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:7-8, NKJV, emphasis added).

The reference to “a fourth of the earth” means one-fourth of the Roman Empire, not one-fourth of planet Earth. In the Book of Daniel, we see a similar reference to the earth as referring to the Roman Empire:

“Thus he said: ‘**The fourth beast [Roman Empire] will be a fourth kingdom on the earth**, which will be different from all the other kingdoms, and **it will devour the whole earth** and tread it down and crush it’ (Daniel 7:23, emphasis added).

⁵⁵ The Greek word *chloros* means “pale green”; “pale” (KJV, NKJ, NIV); “ashen” (NASB).

VAST DEPOPULATION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

During the Crisis of the Third Century, the Roman Empire was greatly depopulated by wars (“sword”), lack of food (“hunger”), and disease. Note that with malnourishment comes the increased risk of widespread disease (plague) and death.

Plagues

The Plague of Cyprian during the Third Century spread throughout the Roman Empire:

The **Plague of Cyprian** is the name given to a pandemic, probably of [smallpox](#), that afflicted the [Roman Empire](#) from AD 250 onwards.[1] It was still raging in 270, when it claimed the life of emperor [Claudius II Gothicus](#). The plague caused widespread manpower shortages in agriculture and the Roman army.[2] ...

In 250 to 266, at the height of the outbreak, 5,000 people a day were said to be dying in Rome.⁵⁶

The earlier Antonine Plague (AD 165-180) killed an estimated five million, about one-third of the people in some areas and decimated the Roman army.⁵⁷

Historian [William McNeill](#) asserts that the earlier [Antonine Plague](#) (166–80) and the Plague of Cyprian were outbreaks of two different diseases, one of smallpox and one of measles, although not necessarily in that order. The severe devastation to the European population from the two plagues may indicate that people had no previous exposure—or immunity—to either disease. The modern consensus, however, is that both outbreaks were of smallpox.[8] This latter view seems likely to be correct given that molecular estimates have placed the evolution of measles

⁵⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section “History”).

⁵⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonine_Plague

after 500 AD.[9]⁵⁸

Detrimental Climate Change

As we have seen, after reaching its peak in the Second Century, the Roman Empire began to decline. At the same time, the population of the Roman Empire, notably in Western Europe, also significantly declined. Tree ring evidence indicates that one of the factors for the decline was due to adverse climate change:

Rome reached its zenith in the 2nd century, then fortunes slowly declined (with many revivals and restorations along the way). The reasons for the decline of the Empire are still debated today, and are likely multiple. Historians infer that the population appears to have diminished in many provinces—especially western Europe—from the diminishing size of fortifications built to protect the cities from **barbarian** incursions from the 3rd century on. Some historians even have suggested that parts of the periphery were no longer inhabited because these fortifications were restricted to the center of the city only. Tree rings suggest "distinct drying" beginning in 250.[6]⁵⁹

All of these facts show that the ancient world of the Roman Empire was dramatically changing:

The period [of Classical Antiquity] was characterized by **an explosion in population with the rise of the Greek and Roman civilizations followed by a steep decline caused by economic and social disruption, migrations, and a return to primarily subsistence agriculture** (emphasis added).⁶⁰

“TO KILL ... BY THE BEASTS OF THE EARTH”

So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was

⁵⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plague_of_Cyprian (section “Epidemiology”).

⁵⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decline_of_the_Roman_Empire (section “Overview”).

⁶⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_demography (introductory material).

Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by **the beasts of the earth** (Revelation 6:8, NKJV, emphasis added).

According to this prophecy, wild animals are among the causes of increased mortality among the population of the Roman Empire. As previously explained, there was a great reduction in population throughout the empire. Roman cities were depopulated for a variety of reasons. In addition, due to the economy, people left the cities to eke out an existence in the rural areas.

[During the Crisis of the Third Century] ... dozens of formerly **thriving cities, especially in the Western Empire, had been ruined, their populations dispersed** and, with the breakdown of the economic system, could not be rebuilt.⁶¹

The common free people of the Roman cities, meanwhile, began to move out into the countryside in search of food and better protection (emphasis added).⁶²

Wild animals naturally move into areas where human populations have dwindled. And people moving from the cities to the rural areas would also increase the incidence of encounters with wild animals. These factors would result in more people being killed by wild animals.

“AND POWER WAS GIVEN TO THEM OVER A FOURTH OF THE EARTH, TO KILL”

According to this prophecy, one-fourth of the population of Roman Empire was wiped out by war, hunger, and disease. According to estimates of the Roman Empire’s population, this means 15-25 million people.

⁶¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section “History”).

⁶² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century (section “Breakdown of internal trade network”).

In recent years, questions relating to ancient demographics [population studies] have received increasingly more scholarly attention,[13] with estimates of the population size of the Roman empire at its demographic peak now varying between 60–70 million ("low count") and over 100 million ("high count").[14] When adhering to a more traditional value of ca. 55 million inhabitants, the Roman Empire still constituted the most populous **Western** political entity until the mid-19th century and likely remained unsurpassed worldwide until the 2nd millennium AD.[15]⁶³

FIFTH SEAL – MARTYRS KILLED BY THE PAGAN ROMAN EMPIRE

The Fifth Seal shows the martyrdom of believers by the 6th Head of the Beast from the Sea, the Pagan Roman Empire:

And when He broke the **fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained**; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also (Revelation 6:9-11, emphasis added).

The martyred believers ask the Lord how long before He avenges their death. The Lord says His judgment will come after the last martyrs join them in Heaven. What martyrs is He referring to? Those martyred by the Pagan Roman Empire, the 6th Head of the Beast.

⁶³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_economy (section “Demography”).

This is not to say that persecution and martyrdom of believers in Messiah Yeshua stopped – it goes on to this day – but that God would judge Rome for what it had done to Messiah Yeshua’s believers, as well as what Rome had done to Jerusalem (Daniel 9:27).

We must understand the Seals and Trumpets in the Biblical context of the Heads of the Beast from the Sea. John was shown that five heads had fallen, one existed at his time (Rome), and two more would follow (Revelation 17:10).

The Seals have to do with the 6th Head of the Beast – Rome – and this is the context for correctly interpreting the meaning of the Fifth Seal. As the Lord said, it would not be long until Rome was judged for its terrible slaughter of believers throughout the Roman Empire. And that judgment would begin with the Sixth Seal, as we will see.

PERSECUTIONS OF BELIEVERS BY ROME

Persecutions of believers took place under several Roman emperors: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Maximinus Thrax, Decius (first empire-wide persecution), Valerian, Diocletian and Galerius (“the Great Tribulation”).

Nero (54-68)

Evidence from ancient documents suggests that the **persecution of Christians by the Roman government did not occur until the reign of Nero.**^[51] In 64, a **great fire** broke out in Rome, destroying portions of the city and economically devastating the Roman population. **Tacitus** records (Annals 15.44) that Nero was rumored to have ordered the fire himself, and in order to dispel the accusations, accused and savagely punished the already-detested Christians (emphasis added).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section “Under Nero”).

Domitian (81-96)

Roman Emperor Domitian ruled at the time of John's visions, as recorded in the Book of Revelation.

According to some historians, **Jews and Christians were heavily persecuted toward the end of Domitian's reign (89-96).**^[58] The **Book of Revelation**, which mentions at least one instance of martyrdom (Rev 2:13; cf. 6:9), is **thought by many scholars to have been written during Domitian's reign**^{[59][60]} (emphasis added).⁶⁵

Trajan (98-117)

Between 109 and 111, **Pliny the Younger** was sent by the emperor **Trajan** (r. 98-117) to the province of **Bithynia** (in **Anatolia**) [modern-day Turkey] as governor, and their **correspondence** is considered a valuable historical source. In one of his letters (Letter 10.96), he inquires about both the charge against and the punishment for Christians.^[51] While some scholars believe that this inquiry shows that Christians had been persecuted in the past,^[67] others find that this shows they were accused but not persecuted.^[56] ... The correspondence also shows that Trajan gave no definite rules or laws about the persecution of Christians^[51] and did not wish to seek out Christians or accept anonymous delations [reports of an offense or crime].^{[51][69]} Many scholars believe that this order was often ignored in the provinces, and Christians were anonymously delated ... [reported as committing an offense or crime]. The letter also shows that Christians were only tested and forced to perform sacrifices only once they

⁶⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section "Under Domitian").

were accused, evidencing the accusatory rather than inquisitory nature of the persecution of Christians before 250.[51]⁶⁶

Note that at this time, Roman officials had the freedom to decide how to handle these cases. However, Pliny the Younger wrote to Trajan for guidance in the matter. As it was always in the best interest of the Roman official to maintain order, when people accused Christians, the official had to deal with the situation in an effective manner.

Marcus Aurelius (161-180)

Sporadic bouts of persecution against Christians occurred during the period from the reign of Marcus Aurelius to that of Maximinus. Governors continued to play a more important role than emperors in this persecution,[70] but some of the emperors who immediately preceded Decius ... passed decrees or laws concerning Christianity: for instance, Marcus Aurelius a universal mandate for public sacrifice, or Septimius Severus a law prohibiting conversion to Christianity ...⁶⁷

Septimius Severus (193-211)

Christians were **persecuted** during the reign of Septimius Severus. **Severus allowed the enforcement of policies already long-established, which meant that Roman authorities did not intentionally seek out Christians, but when people were accused of being Christians they would be forced to either curse Jesus and make an offering to Roman gods, or be executed.** Furthermore, wishing to strengthen the peace by encouraging religious harmony through **syncretism**, **Severus tried to limit the spread of the two groups who refused to yield to syncretism by outlawing conversions to Christianity or Judaism.**[31]

⁶⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section “Under Trajan”).

⁶⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section “Under Marcus Aurelius to Maximinus the Thracian”).

Individual officials availed themselves of the laws to proceed with rigor against the Christians. Naturally the emperor, with his strict conception of law, did not hinder such partial persecution, which took place in [Egypt](#) and the [Thebaid](#), as well as in [Africa proconsularis](#) and the East. Christian [martyrs](#) were numerous in [Alexandria](#).^[31]

No less severe were the persecutions in Africa, which seem to have begun in 197 or 198,^[32] and included the Christians known in the *Roman martyrology* as the martyrs of [Madaura](#). Probably in 202 or 203 Felicitas and [Perpetua](#) suffered for their faith. Persecution again raged for a short time under the proconsul [Scapula](#) in 211, especially in [Numidia](#) and [Mauritania](#). Later accounts also speak of a [Gallic](#) persecution, especially at [Lyons](#), under Severus, but historians, based on archaeological and literary evidence, generally consider these events actually to have taken place under Emperor [Marcus Aurelius](#) (emphasis added).⁶⁸

Maximinus Thrax – “the Thracian” (235-238)

... Perhaps the most famous of ... [the] post-Severan persecutions are those attributed to Maximinus the Thracian. According to Eusebius, a persecution undertaken by Maximinus against heads of the church in 235 sent both Hippolytus and Pope Pontian into exile on Sardinia. Other evidence suggests the persecution of 235 was local to Cappadocia and Pontus, and not set in motion by the emperor.^[78]⁶⁹

Decius (249-251) – First Empire-Wide Persecution

The first empire-wide persecution began with the edict of Decius in 249:

⁶⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septimius_Severus (section “Persecution of Christians and Jews”).

⁶⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section “Under Marcus Aurelius to Maximinus the Thracian”).

The **Decian persecution** resulted from an edict issued in 250 by the **Emperor Decius** ordering everyone in the **Roman Empire** to perform a sacrifice to the Roman gods and the well-being of the Emperor. The edict ordered that the sacrifices be performed in the presence of a Roman magistrate, and a signed and witnessed certificate be issued to that effect. **It was the first time that Christians had faced legislation forcing them to choose between their religious beliefs and death**, although there is no evidence that Decius' edict was specifically intended to target Christians. The edict appears to have been designed more as an Empire-wide loyalty oath. Nevertheless, a number of Christians were put to death for refusing to perform the sacrifices, many others **apostatized** and performed the ceremonies, and others went into hiding. The effects were long-lasting and caused tension between Christians who had performed the sacrifices or fled and those who had not, and left bitter memories of persecution (emphasis added).⁷⁰

... Before the persecution under **Decius** beginning in 250, there was no empire-wide edict against the Christians, and the only solid precedent was that set by Trajan in his reply to Pliny: the name of "Christian" alone was sufficient grounds for punishment and Christians were not to be sought out by the government.⁷¹

Prior to the 249 Decius edict which required all inhabitants of the Roman Empire to sacrifice to the Roman gods, the persecution of Christians had been local affairs, based on local determinations.^{[7][8]} Timothy Barnes characterized the situation by stating: "Actual persecution...was local, sporadic, almost random".^[9] Before the **Decius** edict ushered in an empire wide persecution, individual governors treated Christians very differently depending on the public and social issues, e.g. **Tertullian** wrote that no Christian blood was shed in Africa prior to 180, but Pliny executed Christians in 112 (emphasis added).^{[7][6]}

⁷⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decian_persecution (introductory material).

⁷¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section "Legal basis for persecution").

...the charge of atheism related to the failure to worship the state gods, and made Christianity a superstition and not a religion.[4] George Heyman states that the refusal of Christians to participate in sacrificial rituals that honored the emperor and instead follow their own sacrificial rhetoric and practices conflicted with the Roman forms of social control, making them an undesirable minority.[3]⁷²

Valerian (253-259)

The emperor **Valerian** took the throne in 253 but from the following year he was away from Rome fighting the **Persians** who had conquered **Antioch**, and he never returned, as he was taken captive and died a prisoner. However he sent two letters regarding Christians to the Senate. **The first, in 257, ordered all Christian clergy to perform sacrifices to the Roman gods and forbade Christians from holding meetings in cemeteries.[84]** A second letter the following year **ordered that bishops and other high ranking church officials were to be put to death, senators and knights who were Christians were to be stripped of their titles and lose their property. If they would not perform sacrifices to the gods they also were to be executed. Roman matrons who would not apostatize were to lose their property and be banished, while civil servants and members of the Emperor's staff and household who refused to sacrifice would be reduced to slavery and sent to work on the Imperial estates [85].** The fact that there were such high ranking Christians at the very heart of the Roman imperial establishment shows both that the actions taken by Decius less than a decade before had not had a lasting effect and that Christians did not face constant persecution or hide from public view[86] (emphasis added).⁷³

⁷² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Younger_on_Christians (section “Persecution of Christians”).

⁷³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section “Under Valerian”).

Diocletian (284-305) and Galerius (305-311) – The Great Tribulation

The “great tribulation” is referred to in Revelation Chapter 7, following the description of the Fifth and Sixth Seals:

And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of **the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14, emphasis added).

This is not referring to a future seven-year Tribulation. As we have previously proven, the 70th Week of Daniel has already been fulfilled (see Parts 1, 2 & 3 of this study).

In this verse, the Greek word *thlipsis* (Strong’s #2347) is translated “tribulation”. It can also be translated as “affliction” or “persecution”. This word:

is a cognate form of the verb *thlibo* (see *persecute*). It denotes the results of being squeezed or put into a narrow place – hence, “trouble, affliction, distress.” It is used in several ways in the NT.⁷⁴

The verb *thlibo* (Strong’s #2346), from which the noun *thlipsis* is derived:

literally denotes pressing, squeezing, or crushing. It is usually related to the persecutions specific to believers. In the middle of a list of physical troubles, the author of Hebrews describes the OT saints as “persecuted” for their faith (Heb. 11:37).⁷⁵

Therefore, in Revelation 7:14, the Greek words translated “the great tribulation” can also be translated “the great persecution”.

⁷⁴ Mounce’s *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 743.

⁷⁵ Mounce’s, p. 744.

This is a remarkable link to what is called the Great Persecution under Diocletian and Galerius, which lasted from 303 to 312/313:

The persecutions culminated with [Diocletian](#) and [Galerius](#) at the end of the third and beginning of the 4th century. Their persecution, considered the largest, was to be the last major Roman Pagan persecution, as [Constantine I](#) soon came into power and in 313 legalized Christianity. It was not until [Theodosius I](#) in the latter 4th century, however, that Christianity would become the official religion of the Roman Empire (emphasis added).⁷⁶

During the [Great Persecution](#) which lasted from 303 to 312/313, governors were given direct edicts from the emperor. Christian churches and texts were to be destroyed, meeting for Christian worship was forbidden, and those Christians who refused to recant lost their legal rights. Later, it was ordered that Christian clergy be arrested and that all inhabitants of the empire sacrifice to the gods (emphasis added).⁷⁷

Let's learn more about this period of time when the Great Persecution, i.e., the Great Tribulation, was happening:

Diocletian's accession in 284 did not mark an immediate reversal of disregard to Christianity, but it did herald a gradual shift in official attitudes toward religious minorities. **In the first fifteen years of his rule, Diocletian purged the army of Christians, condemned [Manicheans](#) to death, and surrounded himself with public opponents of Christianity.** Diocletian's preference for activist government, combined with his self-image as a restorer of past Roman glory, presaged **the most pervasive persecution in Roman history. In the winter of 302, Galerius urged Diocletian to begin a general persecution of the**

⁷⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section "History of the persecutions - Overview").

⁷⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section "Legal basis for persecution").

Christians. Diocletian was wary, and asked the oracle of Apollo for guidance. The oracle's reply was read as an endorsement of Galerius's position, and a general persecution was called on February 24, 303 (emphasis added).⁷⁸

The oracle of Apollo in Delphi, Greece was the most highly regarded pagan oracle in the ancient world. Kings went there to ask the god Apollo (one of Satan's manifestations) for guidance in making major decisions affecting their kingdoms. Is it any wonder that Satan's answer convinced Diocletian to persecute believers in Messiah Yeshua?

The persecution of believers by the Roman Empire ended with the Edict of Milan in 313:

Galerius ended the persecution in the East in 311, but it was resumed in [Egypt](#), [Palestine](#), and [Asia Minor](#) by his successor, [Maximinus](#). Constantine and Licinius, Severus's successor, signed the "**Edict of Milan**" in 313, which offered a more **comprehensive acceptance of Christianity** than Galerius's edict had provided. Licinius ousted Maximinus in 313, bringing an end to persecution in the East (emphasis added).⁷⁹

With the Edict of Milan, the Pagan Roman Empire's persecution of believers ended. But Satan's plan to create the false Church of Rome, the Apostasy that the apostle Paul warned about, was just beginning (2 Thessalonians 2:3; see Part 6).

BELIEVERS BEHEADED BY ROME

One method Rome used to execute believers was beheading:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.
And **I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the**

⁷⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section "Under Diocletian and Galerius").

⁷⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section "Under Diocletian and Galerius").

testimony of Jesus [Yeshua] and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ [Messiah] for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4, emphasis added).

One of the groups of martyrs that John saw in Heaven included those who had been beheaded for their faith in Messiah Yeshua. Beheading was one form of execution practiced by the Pagan Roman Empire in its war on believers.

During the reign of Emperor Valerian, the Bishop of Carthage was beheaded:

Among those executed under Valerian ... [was] **Cyprian**, Bishop of Carthage ...

... **Cyprian was decapitated.** The words of the sentence show that in the eyes of the Roman state, Christianity was not a religion at all, and the church was a criminal organization (emphasis added).⁸⁰

Although believers in Yeshua were martyred in all kinds of horrible ways, a believer who was a Roman citizen was legally protected from torture. Beheading was an acceptable method of execution in these cases. One example is the Apostle Paul, a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29), who was tried and executed by beheading in Rome during the reign of Nero (mid-60s).⁸¹ The Apostle James, brother of John, was beheaded in Jerusalem about AD 44 (Acts 12:1-2 “put to death with a sword” indicates beheading). And John the Baptist was beheaded on the order of King Herod, whom the Romans had installed as king of the Jews (Matthew 14:10; Mark 6:16, 27; Luke 9:9). Certainly, there were untold numbers of believers martyred in this way.

⁸⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire (section “Under Valerian”).

⁸¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle (section “His final days spent in Rome”).

In about AD 286, during the Great Persecution under Emperor Diocletian (“the Great Tribulation” referred to in Revelation 7:14), Christian soldiers of Rome’s Theban Legion were beheaded for refusing to carry out orders.⁸²

The Thebans were soldiers, volunteers who refused to desert, yet rejected immoral military obedience even as they refused to use violence to defend themselves against their slayers.⁸³

Maurice, Commander of the Theban Legion, is described as stating that he and others of his men have taken a Christian oath which the pagan oath demanded of them would violate.⁸⁴

There is historical evidence for the existence of the Theban Legion⁸⁵ and that some, but not all, of its Christian soldiers were martyred.⁸⁶

THE FALL OF ROME AND THE RISE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

As the city of Rome declined and eventually fell in 476, the city of Constantinople rose in power and importance, with the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire continuing another thousand years:

By the late 3rd century, the city of Rome no longer served as an effective capital for the Emperor and various cities were used as new administrative capitals. Successive emperors, starting with **Constantine**, privileged the eastern

⁸² <http://www.bibleprobe.com/theban.html> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theban_Legion

⁸³ O’Reilly, p. 195 (see full reference below).

⁸⁴ O’Reilly, p. 201.

⁸⁵ O’Reilly, Donald F., “The Theban Legion of St. Maurice”, p. 198; *Vigiliae Christianae* 32, 195-207; © North-Holland Publishing Company, 1978.

⁸⁶ Donald F. O’Reilly’s work cited above separates historical fact from the legend. Rather than a typical legion of 6000 men, the Theban Legion was a smaller unit of 1000. Not all were martyred; some escaped. Supposed accounts of “miracles”, such as three beheaded saints rising from the dead and carrying their heads in their hands, should be completely discounted.

city of [Byzantium](#), which he had entirely rebuilt after a siege. Later renamed **Constantinople**, and protected by formidable walls in the late 4th and early 5th centuries, **it was to become the largest and most powerful city of Christian Europe** in the [Early Middle Ages](#). Since the Crisis of the Third Century, the Empire was intermittently ruled by more than one emperor at once (usually two), presiding over different regions. At first a haphazard form of power sharing, this eventually settled on an **East-West administrative division between the Western Roman Empire (centered on Rome**, but now usually presided from other seats of power such as [Trier](#), [Milan](#), and especially [Ravenna](#)), **and the Eastern Roman Empire** (with its capital initially in [Nicomedia](#), and later **Constantinople**). The [Latin](#)-speaking west, under dreadful demographic [population] crisis, and the wealthier ... [Greek](#)-speaking east ... began to diverge politically and culturally. Although this was a gradual process, still incomplete when Italy came under the rule of barbarian chieftains in the last quarter of the 5th century it deepened further afterward, and had lasting consequences for the medieval history of Europe.

Throughout the 5th century, Western emperors were usually figureheads, while the Eastern emperors maintained more independence. ... Although **Rome was no longer the capital in the West**, it remained the West's largest city and its economic center. But **the city was sacked by rebellious Visigoths in 410 and by the Vandals in 455, events that shocked contemporaries and signaled the disintegration of Roman authority** (emphasis added).⁸⁷

SEALS 2-4 REVEAL A PIVOTAL POINT IN PROPHETIC HISTORY OF THE BEAST

Seals 2-4 reveal a prophetic picture of a pivotal point in the history of the Beast from the Sea, the destabilization of the Pagan Roman Empire caused by war, economic breakdown, food shortages and disease, resulting in a major depopulation of the Roman Empire.

⁸⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decline_of_the_Roman_Empire (section “Overview”).

These events provided the right conditions for the rise of the Man of Lawlessness, Emperor Constantine the Great, who established the false church (“the apostasy”) of the Roman Empire (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). In the Fourth Century, the Pagan Roman Empire was transformed into the “Christian” Roman Empire, represented by the Beast from the Earth with Two Horns, one horn representing Rome and the other Constantinople (Revelation 13:11-12). But the form of Christianity of Rome was more Pagan than Biblical (see Part 6 “The Man of Lawlessness & the Apostasy – Emperor Constantine & the Roman Church”).

In the next part of this study, we will examine the catastrophic events that led to the collapse of the ancient world and the emergence of the foundation of our modern world today.

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