



Daily Verse and Comment

Revelation 6:5-6

(5) When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. (6) Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

New International Version

"Pair of scales" translates the Greek word *zugón*, which literally means "yoke," as in a yoke of oxen or the yoke of bondage. The beam of a balance, which resembles a yoke's crossbeam, joins or couples the two pans just as a yoke joins the oxen. Just as it is better if the yoked oxen are evenly matched, so the purpose of the balance is to determine that the contents of the two pans are equal.

Today, we have little experience with pairs of scales or balances, yet until recently, they were the commonly used means of weighing substances. Perhaps we are familiar with a pair of scales from its use in a Western movie to determine the weight of a gold nugget. In addition, most of us are aware that a balance is an international symbol of justice, depicting the supposed equality of all before the law. Elements of both of these common uses appear in the third horseman.

In ancient times, the value or quantity of a thing was determined by weighing it on scales. In fact, people bought and sold items by weight or measure rather than by our currency-based system. For instance, the shekel was not originally a unit of money but of weight according to which the price and quantity of things were determined. As such, scales were common marketplace items, and [God](#) demanded they be used justly ([Leviticus 19:36](#); [Proverbs 11:1](#); [16:11](#); [Amos 8:4-10](#); [Matthew 7:2](#)).

Interestingly, because scales are easily manipulated, they can also be a symbol of fraudulent exaction and oppression, as [Hosea 12:7](#) illustrates: "A cunning Canaanite [or *merchant*, referring to Ephraim, which stands for all Israel]! Deceitful scales are in his hand; he loves to oppress." Micah concurs: "Shall I count pure those with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth" ([Micah 6:11-12](#)).

When mentioned in terms of foodstuffs, particularly bread, scales become a symbol of scarcity because, normally, bread would be sold by the loaf without much concern for exact weight. However, during a famine when each ounce of flour was valuable, flour would be rationed by weight or measure, and neither buyer nor seller would want to be cheated. Notice God's prophetic warning in [Leviticus 26:26](#): "When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back to you your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied." The prophet Ezekiel also mentions rationing by weight as a judgment from God:

And your food which you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it. . . . Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread. ([Ezekiel 4:10](#), 16)

God is often depicted in the [Old Testament](#) as holding scales. For example, Hannah prays, "For the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed" ([I Samuel 2:3](#)). Solomon declares, "The Lord weighs the spirits," or the motives and attitudes of people ([Proverbs 16:2](#)). Job cries, "Let me be weighed [margin, *Let Him weigh me*] in a just balance, that God may know my integrity" ([Job 31:6](#)). Perhaps the best known use of the scales in this sense appears in [Daniel 5:25](#), where God tells Belshazzar through Daniel's interpretation, "You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

It is certainly possible that God wants us to understand all these seemingly disparate meanings in the third horseman. His lethal power is a terrible,

divine judgment on mankind for its violent oppression and greed, and it takes the form of famine and wasting through malnutrition.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Four Horsemen \(Part Four\): The Black Horse](#)

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