



[Revelation 6:6](#)

(6) And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

King James Version

After describing the black horse and its rider, John hears "a voice in the midst 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 6:6](#)). Among the Four Horseman, this is an unusual departure; nothing else is said to or about them save in this verse. Being so set apart, the words are doubly significant.

Who speaks these words? John simply says "a voice." Literally, the Greek is "like a voice," which can be stated as "what seemed to be a voice." The only clue we have is that it comes from "in the midst of the four living creatures." [Revelation 4:6](#) provides the answer: "And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures. . . ." (see [Ezekiel 1:4-28](#)). The language suggests that the creatures were situated around the throne, one creature in the middle of each of the four sides. The voice coming from the midst of these creatures must have come from the one sitting on the throne! [God](#) Himself utters these words!

What He says is a common marketplace call of a merchant shouting out the price of his wares. He is setting relative values for both wheat and barley, with wheat being three times as valuable as barley. However, His price is highly inflated! The "quart" here is *choenix* in Greek, which is roughly equivalent to our quart, the amount of grain that a normal man needs each day to survive. In ancient times, though, a denarius would buy eight to ten quarts of wheat, not one! Obviously, these are disaster prices.

The "denarius" was equal to an ordinary worker's daily wage, as [Jesus](#) illustrates in His Parable of the Laborers ([Matthew 20:1-16](#)). These prices, then, give a person an unenviable choice. If he is single, he can buy the more expensive, more nutritious

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wheat, yet have nothing left over, or he can buy the cheaper, less nutritious barley and save the remainder for the next day or so. However, if he is married and has children, he can choose only the barley because he needs more than one quart of grain for his family's subsistence. None of these choices really allows the person either to get ahead or to stay healthy, especially if he has dependents.

God also commands, "Do not harm the oil and the wine," which is a puzzler to scholars. To whom is God speaking—to the horseman or to people in general? It seems to be directed at the horseman, as he is the direct cause of the scarcity. Thus, the staff of life will be in such short supply as to need to be rationed or sold at extortionate prices, but oil and wine will be relatively untouched. Why?

Many commentators consider oil and wine to be luxury items, but this is false. In ancient times, olive oil and wine were staples of the Mediterranean diet along with grain, as [Deuteronomy 7:13](#) and 11:14 indicate (see also [II Chronicles 31:5](#); [32:28](#); [Nehemiah 5:11](#); [Hosea 2:8](#), 22; [Joel 1:10](#); [Haggai 1:11](#)). A person, though, cannot live on oil and wine as he can on grain, yet, as science is just now discovering, they do provide additional and necessary nutrition. These items are available during the third horseman's rampage, but the average man will not have the means to purchase them, since all his money is being spent on flour for bread!

What is God picturing then? The key is to remember that this "famine" is ongoing just as the wars and rumors of wars of the second horseman and the deceptions of the first horseman are. There are occasional lulls of plenty, but the experience of history is that most of the time, the ordinary individual is just getting by. Just as God predicted in [Genesis 3:17-19](#), he labors and toils to eke out a miserable living only to die, worn out and broken in a few, short years. The third horseman's job is to follow his red brother's devastating wars with oppression, corruption, and scarcity so that men stay weak and poor and many die.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

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

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