

The Four Horsemen

From the *Book of Revelation*, Chapter 6 (KJV)

¹And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

²And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

³And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

⁴And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

⁵And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

⁶And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure¹ of wheat for a [day's wages], and three measures of barley for a [day's wages]; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

⁷And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

⁸And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.



The Horsemen of the Apocalypse, depicted in a woodcut by [Albrecht Dürer](#) (ca. 1497–98)

Questions to Consider:

1. Who were the Four Horsemen? What did each horse symbolize?
2. Why would this passage have been so popular in the fourteenth century? What historical developments convinced Europeans that they were experiencing the Apocalypse?

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The Black Death and the Jews

(1348-1349)

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Jewish History Sourcebook:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/1348-jewsblackdeath.html>

In 1348 there appeared in Europe a devastating plague which is reported to have killed off ultimately twenty-five million people. By the fall of that year the rumor was current that these deaths were due to an international conspiracy of Jewry to poison Christendom...

By authority of Amadeus VI, Count of Savoy, a number of the Jews who lived on the shores of Lake Geneva, having been arrested and put to the torture, naturally confessed anything their inquisitors suggested. These Jews, under torture, incriminated others. Records of their confessions were sent from one town to another in Switzerland and down the Rhine River into Germany, and as a result, thousands of Jews, in at least two hundred towns and hamlets, were butchered and burnt....

The first account that follows is a translation from the Latin of a confession made under torture by Agimet, a Jew, who was arrested at Chatel, on Lake Geneva. It is typical of the confessions extorted and forwarded to other towns.

I. The Confession of Agimet of Geneva, Châtel, October 20, 1348

The year of our Lord 1348.

On Friday, the 10th of the month of October, at Châtel, in the castle thereof, there occurred the judicial inquiry which was made by order of the court of the illustrious Prince, our lord, Amadeus, Count of Savoy, and his subjects against the Jews of both sexes who were there imprisoned... This was done after public rumor had become current and a strong clamor had arisen because of the poison put by them into the wells, springs, and other things which the Christians use... Hence this their confession made in the presence of a great many trustworthy persons.

Agimet the Jew, who lived at Geneva... was there put to the torture a little and then he was released from it. And after a long time, having been subjected again to torture a little, he confessed in the presence of a great many trustworthy persons, who are later mentioned. To begin with it is clear that at the Lent just passed Pultus Clesis de Ranz had sent this very Jew to Venice to buy silks and other things for him. When this came to the notice of Rabbi Peyret, a Jew of Chambry who was a teacher of their law, he sent for this Agimet, for whom he had searched, and when he had come before him he said:

"We have been informed that you are going to Venice to buy silk and other wares. Here I am giving you a little package of half a span in size which contains some prepared poison and venom in a thin, sewed leather-bag. Distribute it among the wells, cisterns, and springs about Venice and the other places to which you go, in order to poison the people who use the water of the aforesaid wells that will have been poisoned by you, namely, the wells in which the poison will have been placed."

Agimet took this package full of poison and carried it with him to Venice, and when he came there he threw and scattered a portion of it into the well or cistern of fresh water which was there near the German House, in order to poison the people who use the water of that cistern... Of his own accord Agimet confessed further that after this had been done he left at once in order that he should not be captured by the citizens or others, and that he went personally to Calabria and Apulia and threw the above mentioned poison into many wells...

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you believe Agimet's testimony? What makes it believable or unbelievable?
2. What appears to be the author's opinion concerning Agimet's guilt? On what evidence do you base your conclusion?

The second account describes the Black Death in general and treats specifically of the destruction of the Jewish community in Strasbourg... Those people of Strasbourg, who had thus far escaped the plague and who thought that by killing off the Jews they would insure themselves against it in the future, were doomed to disappointment, for the pest soon struck the city and, it is said, took a toll of sixteen thousand lives.

II. The Cremation of Strasbourg Jewry St. Valentine's Day, February 14, 1349

In the year 1349 there occurred the greatest epidemic that ever happened. Death went from one end of the earth to the other, on that side and this side of the sea, and it was greater among the Saracens [Muslims] than among the Christians. In some lands everyone died so that no one was left. Ships were also found on the sea laden with wares; the crew had all died and no one guided the ship. The Bishop of Marseilles and priests and monks and more than half of all the people there died with them. In other kingdoms and cities so many people perished that it would be horrible to describe. The pope at Avignon stopped all sessions of court, locked himself in a room, allowed no one to approach him and had a fire burning before him all the time. And from what this epidemic came, all wise teachers and physicians could only say that it was God's will. And as the plague was now here, so was it in other places, and lasted more than a whole year. This epidemic also came to Strasbourg in the summer of the above mentioned year, and it is estimated that about sixteen thousand people died.

In the matter of this plague the Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells-that is what they were accused of-and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the pope protected them there.

Nevertheless they tortured a number of Jews in Berne and Zofingen [Switzerland] who then admitted that they had put poison into many wells, and they also found the poison in the wells. Thereupon they burnt the Jews in many towns and wrote of this affair to Strasbourg, Freiburg, and Basel in order that they too should burn their Jews. But the leaders in these three cities in whose hands the government lay did not believe that anything ought to be done to the Jews. However in Basel the citizens marched to the city-hall and compelled the council to take an oath that they would burn the Jews, and that they would allow no Jew to enter the city for the next two hundred years. Thereupon the Jews were arrested in all these places and a conference was arranged to meet at Benfeld Alsace, February 8, 1349. The Bishop of Strasbourg, all the feudal lords of Alsace, and representatives of the three above mentioned cities came there....

THE JEWS ARE BURNT

On Saturday - that was St. Valentine's Day-they burnt the Jews on a wooden platform in their cemetery. There were about two thousand people of them. Those who wanted to baptize themselves were spared. [Some say that about a thousand accepted baptism.] Many small children were taken out of the fire and baptized against the will of their fathers and mothers. And everything that was owed to the Jews was canceled, and the Jews had to surrender all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working-men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt. After this wealth was divided among the artisans some gave their share to the Cathedral or to the Church on the advice of their confessors.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What explanations did European leaders and scholars have for the cause(s) of the Plague?
2. What motive other than religion motivated those who wanted to execute the Jews?

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From the *Book of Deuteronomy*, Chapter 20

When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: "Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."

The officers shall say to the army: "Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it. Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her." Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too." When the officers have finished speaking to the army, they shall appoint commanders over it.

When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby.

However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.

Jean Froissart: On the Hundred Years' War

Medieval Sourcebook: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/froissart-full.asp>

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The "Hundred Years' War" between France and England (1337-1453) was an episodic struggle lasting well over a hundred years, for much of the time without any conflict. The battles were both violent, but also occasions when ideals of "chivalry" were displayed. Here are extracts describing various battles from the Chronicle of Jean Froissart [A contemporary French historian].

The Battle of Crecy (1346)

The Englishmen, who were... lying on the ground to rest... as soon as they saw the Frenchmen approach, they rose upon their feet fair and easily without any haste and arranged their battles...

The lords and knights of France came not to the assembly together in good order... When the French king saw the Englishmen, his blood changed, and [he] said to his marshals: "Make the Genoese [mercenary troops from the city-state of Genoa, Italy] go on before and begin the battle in the name of God and Saint Denis." There were of the Genoese crossbows about a fifteen thousand, but they were so weary of going afoot that day a six leagues armed with their crossbows, that they said to their constables: "We be not well ordered to fight this day, for we be not in the case to do any great deed of arms: we have more need of rest." These words came to the earl of Alencon, who said: "A man is well at ease to be charged with such a sort of rascals, to be faint and fail now at most need."

Also the same season there fell a great rain... with a terrible thunder, and before the rain there came flying over both battles a great number of crows for fear of the tempest coming. Then anon the air began to wax clear, and the sun to shine fair and bright... right in the Frenchmen's eyes and on the Englishmen's backs. When the Genoese were assembled together and began to approach, they made a great [shout] and cry to abash the Englishmen, but [the English long bowmen] stood still and stirred not for all that: then the Genoese again the second time made another leap and a fell cry, and stepped forward a little, and the Englishmen removed not one foot: thirdly, again they leapt and cried, and went forth till they came within shot; then they shot fiercely with their crossbows. Then the English archers stepped forth one pace and let fly their arrows so wholly [together] and so thick, that it seemed snow.

When the Genoese felt the arrows piercing through heads arms and breasts, many of them cast down their crossbows and did cut their strings and returned discomfited. When the French king saw them fly away, he said: "Slay these rascals, for they shall let and trouble us without reason." Then ye should have seen the men at arms dash in among them and killed a great number of them: and ever still the Englishmen shot whereas they saw thickest press; the sharp arrows ran into the men of arms and into their horses, an many fell, horse and men, among the Genoese, and when they were down, they could not relieve again, the press was so thick that on overthrew another.

And also among the Englishmen there were certain rascals that went afoot with great knives, and they went in among the men of arms, and slew and murdered many as they lay on the ground, both earls, barons, knights, and squires, whereof the king of England was after displeased, for he had rather they had been taken prisoners.

The Battle of Poitiers (1356)

Oftentimes the adventure of amours and of war are more fortunate and marvelous than any man can think or wish. Truly this battle, which was near to Poitiers in the fields of Beauvoir and Maupertuis, was right great and perilous, and many deeds of arms there were done the which all came not to knowledge. The fighters on both sides endured much pain: king John [II, of France] with his own hands did that day marvels in arms: he had an axe in his hands wherewith he defended himself and fought in the breaking of the press... [The English gained the initiative and captured a number of powerful French lords.] The chase endured to the gates of Poitiers: there were many slain and beaten down, horse and man, for they

of Poitiers closed their gates and would suffer none to enter; wherefore in the street before the gate was horrible murder, men hurt and beaten down....

[The King of France was taken prisoner. The following passage describes how Edward, the Black Prince, treated the captive French king.]

The same day of the battle at night the [Black Prince] made a supper in his lodging to the French king and to the most part of the great lords that were prisoners. The prince made the king and his son, the lord James of Bourbon, the lord John d'Artois, the earl of Tancarville the earl of Estampes, the earl of Dammartin, the earl of Joinville the lord of Partenay to sit all at one board, and other lords, knights and squires at other tables; and always the prince served before the king as humbly as he could, and would not sit at the king's board for any desire that the king could make, but he said he was not sufficient to sit at the table with so great a prince as the king was....

The Siege of Limoges [1370]

[Edward, the Black Prince, was informed that Limoges, a French city that had previously been captured by the English but had, once again, opened its gates to the French.]

When tidings [had] come to the prince that the city of Limoges was turned French, and how that the bishop, who was his gossip and in whom he had before great trust and confidence, was chief aider to yield up the city and to become French... the prince was sore displeased and esteemed less the men of the Church, in whom before he had great trust. Then he swore by his father's soul, whereby he has never forsworn, that he would get it again and would make the traitors [pay] dearly...

[Edward and his army arrived at Limoges. Edward and his captains concluded that they could not take the city by assault.]

Then the prince thought to assay another way. He had always in his company a great number of miners, and so he set them a-work to undermine...

About the space of a month or more was the Prince of Wales before the city of Limoges, and there was neither assault nor skirmish, but daily they mined... Then the miners set fire into their mine, and so the next morning... there fell down a great pane of the wall and filled the dikes, whereof the Englishmen were glad and were ready armed in the field to enter into the town... there was no defence against them: it was done so suddenly that they of the town were not ware thereof.

Then the [Black Prince], the Duke of Lancaster, the Earl of Cambridge, the Earl of Pembroke, Sir Guichard d'Angle and all the other with their companies entered into the city, and all other foot-men, ready appareled to do evil, and to pillage and rob the city, and to slay men, women and children, for so it was commanded them to do. It was great pity to see the men, women and children that kneeled down on their knees before the prince for mercy; but he was so inflamed with ire, that he took no heed to them, so that none was heard, but all put to death... There was not so hard a heart within the city of Limoges, and if he had any remembrance of God, but that wept piteously... for more than three thousand men, women and children were slain and beheaded that day, God have mercy on their souls, for I [believe] they were martyrs.

And thus entering into the city a certain company of Englishmen... found the bishop: and so they brought him to the prince's presence, who beheld him right fiercely and felly, and the best word that he could have of him was, how he would have his head stricken off, and so he was [taken] out of his sight.

From G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The Chronicles of Froissart*, Lord Berners, trans. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), pp. 104-105, - Battle of Crecy, pp. 128-131. - the Battle of Poitiers, p. 200-201 - Limoges

Document 1.5

Henry V's Speech Before the Battle of Agincourt From Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599)

*The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires.
But if it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive.
No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England.
God's peace! I would not lose so great an honour
As one man more methinks would share from me
For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!
Rather proclaim it... through my host,
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made,
And crowns for convoy put into his purse;
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.
This day is call'd the feast of Crispian.
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say 'To-morrow is Saint Crispian.'
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say 'These wounds I had on Crispian's day.'
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember, with advantages,
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words-
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester-
Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb'ed.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered-
**We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now-a-bed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,***

*And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.*