

## **Facing Disaster Before Deliverance**

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Revelation

John's vision in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation is in essence a visualization of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Through Jesus' faithful witness and sacrificial death, God's kingdom will come in the visible world.

Before deliverance, however, comes disaster. In Revelation Chapters 6–16, reminiscent of the paradigmatic episode of God's deliverance of his people from Egypt, water turns to blood and the heavenly bodies darken. Whether we imagine this as largely in John's day or at some point in the future does not take away the basic point. God's ways are consistent from age to age; the patterns of history repeat as God works his way toward the new heavens and new earth.

The importance of this for the workplace is profound. Let us take the well-known four horsemen of the Apocalypse in Revelation 6. It is generally agreed that they represent War and its devastating consequences of death, famine, and plague. Especially of interest for us is the notice: "I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a

day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!" (Revelation 6:6). The prices of the wheat and barley are clearly inflated—eight times the normal price of wheat and five and one-thirds times the normal price of barley.

While this could be referring to some future devastation, the cycle is all too familiar to every generation—humanity's inability to get along peaceably leads to horrific economic consequences. Since Christians are caught up in these sufferings, we must face the fact that our work and workplaces are often subjected to forces beyond our control. As awful as these forces may be, however, another message of Revelation 6 is that they are under God's control. To the extent that we are able, we must strive to create workplaces where justice is upheld and where people can experience the blessing of developing the gifts God has given them. But we must also recognize that God's providence permits catastrophes to enter our lives as well. Revelation encourages us to look to the ultimate destination of the New Jerusalem in the midst of an often bumpy road.