

Wheat shortage

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There is currently a shortage of wheat worldwide, echoing the experience of the Roman Empire during the third seal.

IN REVELATION 6 it is written, “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” (v. 6). This prophecy concerns the third seal, covering the period A.D. 212–235. The Greek for “measure” is *choenix*, and, according to the Online Bible, this is a dry measure, which would be equivalent to a day’s supply of wheat for one man. A penny, or denarius, was the daily wage for a labourer (Mt. 20:2). Thus, in the third seal, a day’s supply of food would cost a labourer his whole wage for that day. Due to the ruinous reign of emperors such as Caracalla, there were high taxes and the poor could not afford food. Farming became unprofitable. There was famine in the Roman Empire. At the current time there is a worldwide crisis in the supply of wheat which reflects the events of the third seal.

In January of this year, the BBC reported that “People across South Asia are struggling to cope with a severe shortage of affordable wheat and rice”.¹ The following month, the *Financial Times* reported that there had been a surge in the price of top-quality spring wheat, prices jumping by ninety per cent in six weeks.² What has been causing the increase in price?³

The market for wheat is very much a global market. Last year saw a poor worldwide harvest

of wheat. Usually, a poor harvest in one hemisphere will be offset by a normal harvest in the other hemisphere. However, the shortage caused by the failure of crops in the northern hemisphere due to extreme weather was made worse by Australia suffering a second year of low yields. Stores of wheat are at their lowest for sixty years. The shortage is so bad in the US that the American Bakers Association has called for a curb in the export of wheat from the US.

There are several other pressures on the cost of wheat. An increase in the use of meat in Far Eastern diets has led to an increase in demand for wheat for animal food. The developing bio-fuel market has led to an increase in the demand for wheat. Another factor is the increase in the price of oil. Fuel is used by farmers, in factories processing wheat and by companies transporting wheat and its products. Oil derivatives are also used in the packaging associated with wheat products.

Ecclesiastes states that “Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field” (5:9). The wheat shortage indeed affects everyone. It is just one more factor that is contributing to the developing crisis at the time of the end, a crisis for which the experience of the pagan Roman Empire during the third seal provides a precedent.

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1. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7178876.stm.
 2. http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/bab47e26-dd85-11dc-ad7e-0000779fd2ac.html?nclick_check=1.
 3. What follows is based on the above sources and a report on the BBC radio programme, *Farming Today*, 21 Feb. 2008.