

# The Gospel in Revelation

God as one who could inflict eternal torture, the rider of the pale horse works with Hell to destroy our faith.

Death and Hell also use the “sword, hunger, death and the beasts of the earth” to wear down faith in God. These describe war, famine, disease and like calamities under which millions of people have suffered for centuries. Satan wants us to view suffering as proof positive that no loving God rules the heavens and died for mankind. This final horse and rider embody an argument that is unanswerable in the minds of many. So in this final pale horse we see a powerful three-fold attack against faith in God: Death, Hell, and human suffering all join to persuade us against a God of love.

The good news is that the Bible teaches that Christ has destroyed death and “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). The devil would uproot our faith in God. Yet, despite all that we suffer, nothing can separate us from this love of God found in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35-39). God suffers with us in all our afflictions and He, too, longs for the day when pain and suffering will be no more (Isaiah 63:9; Revelation 21:4).

## A Parallel Parable

The truth of the four horsemen that Jesus brought to John in Revelation is the same truth, though using different symbolism, that Jesus spoke in the parable of the sower and the seed. Let’s consider this interesting parallel between the four horsemen and the four types of soil:

“Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:18-23).

Consider the parallels:

- 1) This parable presents four kinds of soil. Revelation presents four horses and their riders.
- 2) In the gospel account, seeds sown in three types of soil do not produce fruit. In Revelation, three of the riders destroy faith in the gospel.
- 3) In the gospel account, the seed sown in one soil brings forth good fruit. In Revelation, one of the riders conquers hearts for the kingdom of God.

The first soil simply represents one who “does not understand.” This soil parallels the pale horse rider who strives to create misunderstanding and mistrust of God. That a God of love would allow so much pain and suffering in this world can be difficult to understand. Satan takes advantage of this and would lead us to doubt God.

The second seed falls in stony places. Here we see the parallel to the red

horse of persecution. The stony places represent those who turn back from Christ because of “tribulation or persecution.”

A third seed falls among thorns. These represent the same truth brought to view in the black horse of darkness. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the seed of truth and Christ is replaced.

Finally, we have the good ground into which the fourth seed falls. It represents those who hear the gospel, understand the character of God, and bear varying quantities of fruit. The work and power of the white horse, going forth conquering and to conquer with the wonderful good news of salvation, parallels the fertile ground.

The truth of the parable taught by Jesus Himself in the Gospels is repeated in the symbolism of the four horsemen of Revelation to underscore its importance. When the message of God’s love for a lost world is embraced in the fertile ground of understanding, much fruit will burst forth. As Jesus said, “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:16-17).

A day is coming when the riders on the red horse, the black horse and the pale horse shall be completely confounded (Zechariah 10:5). The unsealing of the fifth, sixth and seventh seals of Revelation reveals the judgment of the faithful, Christ’s return, the terror of the lost and the innumerable company saved by the Lamb. Revelation 7 then brings us a picture of hope, revealing what this white-horse rider accomplishes in spite of fierce opposition. In summary, John says:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9-10, NAS).

God wants us to be encouraged by this picture. He knows the difficulties we face in this world, but His grace is sufficient. Revelation 7 tells us that no man can number the saved. That means there is room enough in heaven for you and me and anyone who wants to be there.

## Summary

Revelation reveals a powerful image of our history and future in four horses and their riders. Jesus, in Matthew 13, represented every soul as one of four types of ground where the seed of God’s truth is sown. These four horses and four types of ground represent the response of all people to the word of God. Today the white horse rider offers us victory over sin and death (Matthew 1:21; 1 Corinthians 15:26). Christ rides forth conquering and to conquer while Satan attempts to challenge Christ’s work of grace upon our hearts through the three horses of persecution, worldly compromise and death. Yet the white horse and its rider will prevail. Christ has unsealed our fate and altered our history. He will return to deliver His people from the sting of death. And that company of the saved, no man can number. Won’t you, dear reader, choose to be among them?

# Preludes of Hope

## The Four Horsemen

“And 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.’ And 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” (Revelation 6:2).

Revelation 6 begins with the Lamb breaking the seals of the scroll. As He pulls them back, one of the most fascinating symbolic scenes in the Bible unfolds. Riders on horses burst forth—one, then another, then a third and a fourth. The images of these symbolic horsemen thundering through the earth pique our curiosity, yet to many their true identities are shrouded in mystery.

One key to unlocking the symbolism of the four horsemen is their connection to the previous chapter. We previously learned that the sealed scroll in chapter 5 represented the title deed to this earth and, therefore, held an accurate record of the history of nations and individuals. Again, allowing the Bible to unlock its own symbols, we find an unusual alluding to horses in the Old Testament book of Zechariah: “For the Lord of hosts hath visited His flock . . . and hath made them as His goodly horse in the battle” (Zechariah 10:3).

Here we find that a horse in the Bible can represent people. As four horses are depicted in Revelation 6, separate and distinct from one another, the number four also bears symbolic significance. It is used in prophetic revelation to designate the four winds, the four directions of Earth, and therefore all people in those directions. So, symbolically speaking, every single person is represented in these four horses—white, red, black and pale. Let’s take a closer look at each of these prophetic symbols.

## The White Horse

In Revelation 6:1-2, we find a white horse and its rider going forth to conquer. Revelation 19:11 also pictures Christ on a white horse, making war in righteousness and judgment. And the Revelation 19 picture speaks of “the nations” (verse 15). So we can conclude, from the Bible’s own interpretation, that the horse of Revelation 6:2 represents God’s people who unite with

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Christ (symbolized by the rider) and are covered with heaven’s righteousness (symbolized by the color white). *Leukos*, here translated “white,” (pronounced *lyoo-kos*, from “luke”) means “light, bright, brilliant.” It is used over a dozen times in the book of Revelation, always in association with God, heaven and righteousness (Revelation 3:4-5; 3:18; 4:4; 7:9; 20:11).

The rider is also portrayed as wearing a crown on His head and having a bow in His hand. The word for “bow” is *toxon* (tox’-on). It appears only once in the New Testament in this form, but is derived from the base *tikto*, which means to “bear,” “bring forth” as in birth, “be delivered” (in this case, that which the bow brings forth). This root word was used five times in Revelation 12 in reference to Jesus Christ being brought forth as a man-child. This biblical evidence further supports chapter 6’s connection to chapter 5, which pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the only means of opening the sealed scroll. Surely then, Christ’s sacrifice is the weapon used to conquer. Therefore this bow of Revelation 6:2 heralds the good news of Jesus Christ, who was brought forth as a man to be our Savior (Luke 2:10-11).

The word “crown” here is *stephanos* (stef’-an-os). It signifies a victor’s wreath rather than a royal diadem. Seven of the eight uses of this word in Revelation use this type of crown in referring to Christ or His faithful people (Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; 12:1; 14:14). This crown represents His victory over sin on our behalf. Those who accept the gift of salvation are also represented in the Old Testament as “the stones of a crown lifted up as an ensign” (Zechariah 9:16).

The word “conquer” comes from the Greek word *nikao* (nik-ah’-o). It was the very same word, meaning “prevailed,” used to describe Christ’s worthiness to open the sealed book in Revelation 5:5. In fact, this word is used throughout the book of Revelation in the form of “overcome.” All of the seven churches in the first vision of Revelation were admonished to “overcome” or “conquer” in order to receive the reward of eternal life. This second vision of the seven seals that repeats the admonition to “overcome” points us in the direction of placing our trust wholly in Christ.

We are directed away from man to Christ for overcoming because chapter 5 showed us that no man in heaven, in Earth or under the earth was able or worthy to open the scroll. (Revelation 5:3-4). Christ alone can open the scroll, changing the destiny of nations and individuals by His death. And now the white-horse rider illustrates our victory in Christ as He goes forth conquering and to conquer. We need only surrender our lives to Him and let Him take the reigns of our hearts. He alone is the Conqueror, the Prevailer, the One who has overcome. Revelation 12 affirms that Christ alone is the key to our victory over Satan when it says, “And they overcame (conquered) him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11).

The word here for “overcome” is the same one used in chapter 6 for “conquer.” By His life and death, Christ conquered death. He conquered sin. He conquered the grave. As we unite with Him, we receive His victory and go forth to share our knowledge of Him with others as depicted by the powerful white horse: “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14, NKJV).

From a biblical perspective, all the symbols of the first horse point to Christ and His people. Jesus Christ is the rider, the head of the body (1 Corinthians 12). He has empowered His people to go forth in the Holy Spirit to convict all for whom He gained the victory (Matthew 28:19-20). Through the faith of His people, Christ rides throughout the length and breadth of the earth today proclaiming the gospel of His love and His power to overcome the world (Galatians 3:20). His convicting arrows of love find their mark in our hearts and draw all men unto Him (John 12:32).

As the prophetic scene continues to unravel the mystery of the four horses, we find three horses yet to follow.

## The Red Horse

“And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, ‘Come and see.’ And 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” (Revelation 6:3-4).

As with the white horse, this one is also symbolic of people, but this time not of a people who are covered with the white righteousness of Christ. Instead, these people are symbolically identified with the color red.

The word “red” comes from the Greek *purrhos* (poor-hros’), which also means “having the color of fire.” This Greek word is mentioned in Revelation 12 to describe the “great red dragon,” a symbol of Satan (Revelation 12:3, 9). Just as the word “white” (describing the first horse) is used only in reference to heavenly things, now we find the word “red” is used only in relation to Satan.

This red horse and its rider are further described as taking peace from the earth. The Greek word for peace, *eirene* (i-ray’-nay), means “the Messiah’s peace; the way that leads to peace (salvation).” It also means “Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ.” In this red horse, we see a symbolic image of Satan’s influence to take the peace of God from people.

The red-horse rider uses a “great sword” as a weapon. A sword, when used by God, represents His Word (Ephesians 6:17). When used by Satan it represents persecution, both physical and verbal (Acts 12:2; Proverbs 12:18).

The red horse, then, represents the spirit of oppression aroused by Satan. Through the sword of persecution and false teachings, he works to take the peace of Christ from men and women.

## The Black Horse

“And 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. 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’” (Revelation 6:5-6).

The first symbol we will look at is again the color of the horse. The Bible uses darkness as a symbol for the power of Satan (Acts 26:18). This horse represents people who choose darkness over light (John 3:19-21).

The “pair of balances” is an interesting image conveying important Bible truth. The phrase comes from one Greek word *zugos* (pronounced dzoo-gos), meaning

“yoke, burden or bondage.” It can refer to either the yoke Christ calls us to bear (Matthew 11:28-30) or to a false yoke of spiritual bondage or legalism as the following verses indicate:

“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (Acts 15:10).

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

The balances deepen the symbolism of the black horse, in this case referring to the subtle forms of legalism that erode the liberty of Christ’s gospel. Wheat and barley were vital staples in the diet of the day. Their symbolism refers to spiritual food. Jesus said that He is the bread of life (John 6:33-35; 48-51). The Word was made flesh (John 1:14). When we partake of Christ and His Word, we will never hunger or thirst. The rationing of wheat and barley for a “penny,” which was about a day’s wage in biblical times, signifies a famine for Christ and Bible truth.

“Oil and wine” are also biblical symbols. Oil represents the anointing of the Spirit (1 John 2:18-20) and wine represents the blood of Christ (Mark 14:23-25). Therefore the oil and wine here signify those who rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit and the blood of Christ for their salvation. As we today are filled with the Holy Spirit and find our strength in Christ, we will resist legalism and come out of darkness into God’s “marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

## The Pale Horse

“And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, ‘Come and see.’ And 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” (Revelation 6:7-8).

There is little need to identify the rider of this horse by finding meaning in its color. He is clearly identified as Death. No other rider has been identified by name. This indicates the open enmity this rider bears to the white horse and Christianity, for death is the last enemy of Christ that shall be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26).

How many precious souls have turned from God in the mistaken notion that He is the author of death! This horse represents those who openly rail against God through the influence of its rider. In fueling the false image of God as a murderous overlord, this final rider has influenced millions to reject the gospel.

A point of particular significance here is that “hell followed with” the pale-horse rider. The Greek word for “followed” is *akoloutheo* (ak-ol-oo-theh-o) and has a number of meanings:

- 1) to follow one who precedes, to join him as his attendant, to accompany him
- 2) to join one as a disciple, to become or be his disciple
- 3) to side with another’s party

This wording signifies a union, and even a discipleship, taking place between the rider Death and Hell. Hell, referring to the final destruction of evil, has been used by false teachers to misrepresent God in much the same way that Death has been used to falsely accuse Him. The distortion in this doctrine claims that God will burn people for millions and billions of years without end. By representing