

of it as you read these words addressed to the conquering Messiah: “in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies; whereby the people fall under thee” (Ps. 45:4-5).

The book of Acts records the riding of the white horse from Jerusalem to Judaea, Samaria, Antioch, Turkey and Greece (to use their modern names), and Rome. The first seal speaks of the spread of the gospel in the Middle East, southern Europe and North Africa in the first few centuries after Pentecost. Next the white horse turned north to the lands beyond the Alps. In the last several centuries, the white horse has galloped to all the continents, scores of countries and thousands of islands. The rider on the white horse, as Revelation 6:2 says, “went forth conquering, and to conquer.”

This has been going on now for some 2,000 years, involving preaching, catechizing and lecturing, and thus also the training of pastors. Arrows are shot from the gospel bow through Bible studies; Christian CDs, DVDs, books, pamphlets and radio broadcasts; and Reformed websites. All this, of course, is joined with the worshipping, praying, fellowshiping, giving and witnessing of all the saints. The white horse rides in instituted congregations and on mission fields, so that the elect are gathered out of the four corners of the earth as Christ’s one, holy, apostolic and catholic or universal church!

The red horse speaks of war (Rev. 6:3-4). The horseman carries a “great sword,” a weapon of war. Power was given to him “to take peace from the earth,” the result of war. The “red” colour of the horse suggests blood, the effusion of war. The slaughter is not persecution for the killing is reciprocal (of “one another”), the fatalities of war.

Just think of the various wars in the last two millennia, including the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire, such as those of Attila the Hun; the Magyar and Viking attacks in eastern and northern Europe; the Norman conquest of Britain; the Crusades against the Saracens, the Hundred Years’ War and the Wars of the Roses; World Wars I and II; the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Falklands War and the Iraq War. Of course, there have been many other wars all around the globe. There are also different types of conflict: civil wars, revolutionary wars, imperial wars, etc.

The riding forth of the red horse involves military training, weaponry and uniforms; propaganda, the draft and armies; generals, spies and POWs; heroes, cowards and traitors; logistics, medals and graveyards; diplomacy, ceasefires and treaties; rumours of wars, intermittent wars and cold wars; war on land, war on sea, war in the air and total war; nationalism and internationalism; destruction and carnage; war gods and a war economy. Like the white horse, the red horse was sent forth by, and is always under the control of, the crucified and risen Lamb of God!

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The White and Red Horses

The four horsemen in Revelation 6:1-8 constitute a unit within the seven seals. Unlike the other three, the first four seals deal with horses. Each horse is a certain colour: white, red, black or pale. Each horse has a rider and each horseman has a weapon or implement. The first carries a bow, the second wields a sword and the third holds a set of balances or scales. It is somewhat different regarding the fourth horse: “his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him” (8).

Unlike the other three, in the first four seals each of the four horses with their horsemen is introduced by a “beast” or living creature with the words: “Come and see” (1, 3, 5, 7). As we listen to the hoofbeats of the white, red, black and pale horses sent out by the Lamb, we are listening to four different sets of hooves.

Why horses with their horsemen? They are used in Scripture to speak of God’s mighty and mysterious providences, as in Zechariah 1 and 6. Horses are beasts with impressive strength and courage. Thus the Lord questioned Job, “Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible” (Job 39:19-20).

Why are there horsemen on the steeds of Revelation 6:1-8? Riderless horses go where they please for their power is not harnessed. But a horse with a rider is governed and directed—an appropriate image of Jehovah’s powerful and profound providence.

Let us now consider each of the four horses in turn, beginning with the white horse (1-2). There is probably the most disagreement as to the identity of this horse and its rider. Some say it speaks of the past, either a Roman general at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 or Constantine the Great in the fourth century. For others, the first seal pictures the final terrible Antichrist in the future. We believe that the white horse refers to the progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so it speaks of the past, present and future.

“White” is symbolic of righteousness and holiness, which the gospel of grace alone brings. Revelation 6:2 is redolent of victory. The whiteness of the horse points to this, as does the “crown” or victor’s laurels given to its rider. However, this is especially emphasized by his going forth “conquering, and to conquer.” Only Christ’s gospel brings a victorious righteousness and holiness, with nothing but conquest and no defeat.

The white horse rides throughout all of the New Testament era, from Pentecost to our Lord’s glorious return (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 10:13-18). It has been, is and will be victorious in the hearts and lives of all of God’s elect, and the gospel will never be overcome (Rom. 1:16-17; I Cor. 1:17-31; II Cor. 2:14-16).

What about the “bow” in the hand of the rider on the white horse (Rev. 6:2)? Think

How Could Satan Enter Heaven?

“God summoned the ‘sons of God,’ which refer to angels in this instance, before Him and Satan also came ... ‘Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them’ (Job 1:6). My question is, How can sinful Satan enter into heaven when a ‘sinner’ can’t do so? I know God is sovereign and He can do what He likes, but would this not defile heaven?”

The questioner is correct that no sinner can enter or even see heaven (John 3:3, 5; Eph. 5:5; Heb. 3:18-19). Yet Job 1:6 and Revelation 12:7-12 make it clear that Satan had access to heaven to bring his accusations against Job. So he appears before God among the unfallen angels (called “sons of God” in Job 38:7) to charge Job with the most mercenary of motives in serving God. Though Job’s name comes up in the conversation between God and Satan almost as an afterthought, there can be no doubt that Satan’s presence in heaven was the beginning of his evil attack against this godly man.

How was this possible? First, heaven was Satan’s home in the beginning (Isa. 14:12; Jude 6). Second, though he was cast down by sin, there is no evidence in Scripture that he was banned from heaven until the time of Christ’s ascension (Rev. 12:5-12).

That Satan had access to heaven in the Old Testament is unquestionable. Revelation 12:5-12 helps us to answer the question how Satan’s access to heaven was possible, as we shall see shortly. There Satan is called “the accuser of our brethren ... which accused them before our God day and night” (10) and he most certainly appears in that role in the book of Job, as he did also with Joshua the high priest in Zechariah 3:1-2.

Satan lived up to his name in the story of Job, for Satan means “slanderer” or “accuser.” He is that especially in his charge that Job served God only for what he got out of it, that is, only because God had made him wealthy. That charge must be slander because the true service of God cannot possibly be motivated by self-interest. It is always and only the fruit of God’s amazing grace.

Revelation 12:7-9 tell how all this accusing in the presence of God came to an end. Upon the exaltation of our Saviour, there was war in heaven between Michael and his angels, and Satan and his. What a war between angels and demons is like we can only imagine, but it must be, in light of Jude 9, a war of words. In that war, Michael and his host prevailed, through the power of the ascended Christ, and Satan was cast out. No doubt it is the finished work of Jesus that is Satan’s downfall for there is no longer any room for such accusations as Satan brought against Job. “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:33-34). Satan’s access to heaven, therefore, was possible because Christ had not yet come and provided a sacrifice for sin that would put an end to Satan’s work in heaven as the accuser of the brethren.

Satan did exactly what Romans 8:33-34 says is no longer possible. He brought charges against one of God’s elect, and that can only be because Christ had not yet come in

the flesh and His atoning sacrifice for sin had not yet been offered. Job had no doubt, however, that Christ was his all-in-all and so confessed a living Saviour in Job 19:25-27. The Messiah would deliver him not only from the vicious attacks of the great deceiver but from all his sins. He would give Job life everlasting in the presence of God, that is, in the very place where Satan was then able to stand.

Satan still accuses us *in our own consciences*. But when he tempts us, we know that Christ’s finished work took away whatever right he had to appear before God and to bring his slanderous accusations before the Judge of all. Who indeed can now lay anything before God as a charge against one of His elect? Christ not only died for our sins and rose again for our justification, but is now in heaven as living proof that all such charges are baseless. There He prays for us to deliver us from Satan’s attacks here on earth.

It is worth noting that, even though he was still able to bring his wicked accusations against Job, he could only do so under the sovereign direction and control of Almighty God. As one writer puts it, Satan comes “to offer his homage, to receive his commissions, to render his stated account of work done and service performed ... in the attitude of a servant of God, and made subservient to the discipline and training of his people ... In all his blasphemous designs he is, in spite of himself, doing the work of God ... In moving heaven and earth to accomplish the perdition of those whom Christ has ransomed, he is actually fitting them for glory.”

God’s sovereignty over Satan is revealed in Satan’s inability to do anything against Job without God’s permission. Jehovah strictly limited what Satan was able to do. In this first trial, Satan is forbidden to put forth his hand against Job’s person, though he was able to take everything else away from Job. Nor must the word “permission” cause us to stumble and question God’s sovereignty. The word describes what we read in the story of Job, but there is no difference between God permitting Satan to act against Job and God Himself acting, surely not when Satan is entirely in the hand of God.

This comes out especially in Job 1:11, where Satan invites God to put forth His “hand” to “touch” Job’s possessions and family. When God says to Satan, “all that he hath is in thy power” (12), He makes it clear that Satan is merely His instrument. Satan’s own words show that he himself recognized this. Job, whether aware or not of Satan’s agency, understood that it was God who afflicted him and he speaks of this often.

There is a lesson for us: Satan’s activity, even when successful, is under God’s direction and control, so we can be sure that our transgressions, though inexcusable, are nevertheless used by our sovereign God for our good. Certainly that was true in the case of Job. Though he fell prey to the roaring lion who is Satan, even his sin brought him to a better confession of God’s sovereignty and to a humble confession of his sin.

Nevertheless, we ought to tremble when we think of Satan’s power, given by God to be sure, but great indeed. God said of Job to Satan, “Behold, he is in thine hand” (2:6). He is indeed the prince of this world and an enemy to be reckoned with. Only by the grace of the risen and exalted Christ, received by faith and through prayer, is he to be resisted and overcome.

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