

# The Red Horse of the Apocalypse

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War has been the great burden of history. Interwoven between the pages of history is the scarlet thread of bloodshed. At no period, at least not for very long, has the world been free from war. Christ explains this for us, “And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,” Matthew 24:6, 7.

But why? How can we explain this? The answer is found here in our study of Revelation 6:3, 4, “And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see (or more correctly, “Come!” as directed to the horse itself). 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.” This is the red horse of the apocalypse.

## THE RED HORSE – WAR

We should briefly reconstruct the scene of the vision which John received, Rev. 4 and 5. He saw the throne in heaven, a throne which represented God’s presence in heaven. Surrounding this throne were the four beasts (brute creatures), the twenty-four elders (the church of the Old and New Testament), the angels, and the innumerable throng of saints. Jehovah had a scroll in His right hand. This book represents His sovereign counsel and decree which contains all the details as to how He will realize the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The book is sealed because it is God’s secret. The question was raised, who is worthy to open the book, that is to reveal its contents not only, but also to realize them, to bring them to pass. None could do this except the Lamb that appeared as it had been slain. Christ is worthy to open the book. This He immediately begins to do. The first seal is broken and it reveals the white horse. This, we saw in our last article, represents the victorious preaching of the gospel. Christ directs the preaching in such a way that all His people are saved. When the last elect is saved, the end will come.

Now our attention is directed toward the breaking of the second seal. Once it is broken, Christ calls out, Come! Forthwith the second horse comes riding, it is red. Once again we are reminded that a horse represents a great powerful force. We need but read the description of the battle horse given in Job 39:19-25 to understand this. The color of red would indicate that it is the symbol of lust and passion. The contrast is made between red and white (purity) in Isaiah 1:18. There, our sins are described as scarlet and crimson. The redness of Esau indicated robust power, Genesis 25:25. The dragon, Satan, is pictured as red, burning with lust and evil, rev.13:3. This evil lust for power and wealth produces bloodshed. The text adds to this that a great sword is given to the rider, an obvious symbol of war. The explanation is given, “And power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another,” Rev.6:4. We conclude that this red horse represents the terrible power of war as it is present in history.

We also learn why war is present in history. Consider the fact that Christ is the one who calls to the red horse, “Come!” The horse has a rider, one who directs it. In addition we read, “and power was given to him to take peace from the earth”. Who gave him that power? The answer is that Christ does. No, war does not run haphazardly through history, without divine direction. War is also under the sovereign control of Christ who causes all things to work together for good to them that love God, Rom. 8:28.

In directing war in this manner, Christ does not force men to fight against their will. War finds expression in the depraved nature of man. We need but remind ourselves that sin makes man greedy, he covets what his neighbor has. Isn’t this what causes war, one country becomes the aggressor over against another? In trying to satisfy this lust for power and wealth, man will resort to murder, to open conflict. There is something else that we must add to this. Not only did man fall into sin as an individual, he fell into sin as a king. Adam was the king of creation. Once this man has fallen, he still wants to exercise this kingship. He envisions the great kingdom of man, he dreams that he will be remembered in history as the one who realized man’s great dream of world conquest. Think of

Nebuchadnezzar! Hence war seems to serve man's vanity. He foolishly thinks that war will be the one great tool by which he can fashion his dream for world domination.

As Christ exercises His rule over the nations, He controls and directs this sinful urging for war in such a way that it serves the realization of His own kingdom. Let's consider how this is true.

## RED FOLLOWS WHITE

At this point we should ask an important question. Is there any significance in the order of the horses, why does the red horse come after the white? In answering this, we must consider two things. First, that the white horse causes the red horse to follow, and secondly, the red horse follows the white horse because it serves it.

Let's examine the first of these, that the white horse causes the red horse to follow. If we interpret the symbolism, this means that the preaching of the gospel causes war and bloodshed. We might think that it does the opposite, how can this be true?

The answer lies in the content of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel articulates the message of the Kingdom of Christ. Think upon the great themes of the gospel: the sovereignty of God, the redemption of the elect by Christ, the Lordship of Christ over all of life, man's inability to do any good apart from regeneration and grace, the return of Christ and the establishment of His perfect kingdom in the new heavens and earth. This is the good news for every citizen of the kingdom.

The more this message is declared indiscriminately, that is wherever God in His good pleasure sends the gospel, the more heated the enemies of the kingdom of heaven become. They hate that message for they see it as a threat upon their own little domain which they vainly dream will stand forever. Allow us to illustrate. Remember King Herod and the visit of the wisemen, Matt.2. He was a jealous tyrant. The mere mention of the birth of the King of the Jews caused him to unsheath his sword in jealous rage and kill all the babes of Bethlehem and cities around there, thinking that he might thereby remove the threat to his kingdom. This represents the evil assault that many rulers in history have placed against the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. They will start a war to protect their interests when they think that they are endangered in any manner or from any quarter. This explains for us the motive of the last great battle in history, the battle of Armageddon, the heathen nations will attack the nominally Christian nations thinking they are attacking Christ, Rev.20.

The preaching of the gospel produces peace, not among the nations, but in the hearts of God's people.

The second explanation of the relationship between white and red is that the red horse of war serves the white horse of the gospel. How?

First, the presence of war in history is for the good of God's people. We realize that we do not consider this very often, rather we sometimes eagerly pray for peace and imagine that a world free from war is the Christian's dream. Surely, we do not justify war, it is sinful and wicked and must be laid to man's charge. Nevertheless, Christ overrules sinful man. He is not sitting in heaven wringing His hands and wondering what to do with the belligerent human race. Christ triumphs over man's sins, also those of war. He does this by causing the nations to become preoccupied with their wars in order that within these nations, so distracted by war, the gospel may be preached and the church gathered. Rev. 20, which deals with the binding of Satan, tells us that Satan is bound just from this point of view that he cannot cause the nations to fight the last battle until the very end when the church is completely gathered. Until such a moment, wars are commonplace to mankind. The only time there will be a temporary peace is when the antichrist reigns, Rev. 13.

There is another reason why war helps God's people, it causes them to see first-hand that this world is not their home, their home is the kingdom of heaven. War sanctifies God's people, what parent doesn't experience this when their son goes to battle and some never return? The horrors of war cry out for justice and mercy, which the people of God do not expect to have realized on this side of the grave, but in the kingdom of Jesus Christ alone.

## A MESSAGE OF PEACE

What do we learn from this?

Listen, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," Isaiah 57:20, 21. If you want peace, do not try to find it amongst the heathen nations, for fallen man cannot obtain peace.

Listen again, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," John 14:27. This peace finds expression in the heart of the child of God now, and will reach its apex in the peaceful kingdom of heaven.