

RED. The second horse is blood-red in color, for good reason. Instead of using the “normal” Greek words, John describes it using terms related to sacrifice. Priests used the knife (machaira) to slaughter (sphazo) animal sacrifices. In the New Testament, Christ is the High Priest of the new covenant (**Hebrews 4:15; 8:1, 2**). In the previous vision, Jesus the Lamb is described as slain (sphazo) (**Rev. 5:6**), as are the righteous under the heavenly altar (**Rev. 6:9**).

In order to follow God’s will, we must surrender our will at the foot of Jesus’ cross (**Luke 9:23**)—the “old man” must be crucified in order for us to experience Christ’s resurrection power in our life (**Rom. 6:1–11**). We must come to the altar of faith daily and offer up our life to God as a “living sacrifice” (**Rom. 12:1**). By following Jesus’ example, we become “more than conquerors [nike]” over temptation and sin (**Rom. 8:37**).

BLACK. In the complete absence of white, the third rider bears an ominous message. The spring harvest (wheat and barley) has been devastated by famine—a sign, or “curse,” used with ancient Israel to draw attention to her unfaithfulness to the

covenant relationship with God. The Old Testament imagery is used here as a stark warning for those Christians who profess to have a relationship with Jesus, “the mediator of the New Covenant” (**Heb. 12:24**), but really do not. Though the outcome of the fall harvest (oil and wine) has yet to be determined, it will usher in the great day of judgment—known to Israel as the Day of Atonement (**Lev. 16**). Earth’s probation time is running out, and the same is true for all who merely profess Christ’s name.

PALE. In four steps, we have moved from the color of victory to the color of death. The opportunity to repent is past. The rider’s sword (rhomphia) is a symbol of judgment—it will be used by Christ to destroy all wickedness at the end (**Rev. 19:15**). This death (apokteino) is not sacrificial but is final and eternal. The collective “weapons” represent the fulfillment of ancient Israel’s covenant curses (**Ezek. 14:21**) for unfaithfulness to God. The symbolic activity, then, is based on Christ’s authority and is entirely under His control (see **Rev. 1:18**).

At this point, one might ask about the

“secret rapture.” Revelation’s opening story refutes this theory. Most prophecy scholars agree that Revelation 4:1, 2 does not specifically say anything about a secret rapture at all. If we go by the Scriptures, God’s people must be raptured very publicly at some point after the four horsemen have completed their mission on earth.

A number of serious questions follow the four horsemen’s messages: Are you “able to stand” in God’s holy presence (**Rev. 6:17**)? Have your sins been repented of, forgiven, and washed away by the cleansing “blood of the Lamb” (**Rev. 7:14**)? Are you experiencing daily victories (nike) over temptation and sin in the power of Jesus’ name (**Rev. 12:11**)? If you answered Yes to each of these, you may look up into the heavens with assurance, knowing that your Lord will soon return. “Behold, He is coming!” (**Rev. 1:7**).

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REVELATION

VICTORY IN JESUS



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

The Bible is the story of Jesus Christ and His victory over Satan and death. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, portrays this story through symbols (taken mostly from the Old Testament) in a collection of visions given to John, a disciple who was close to Jesus during His ministry on earth. Written a few decades after Jesus' death and resurrection, Revelation was intended to assure the early Christians of Jesus' return.

Revelation is also a prophecy that outlines details of church history, from Jesus' ascension into heaven all the way to His second coming. As we look back over the past 2,000 years, we discover that God's written Word is both accurate and trustworthy.

OVERVIEW

The book of Revelation begins by introducing Jesus Christ as the High Priest in the sanctuary in heaven. He points out spiritual deficiencies in His church and admonishes believers to repent of their ways and overcome temptation to sin as

He overcame it (Rev. 1–3). John watches as Jesus prepares to open a mysterious scroll, and four cosmic horsemen ride forth with important messages that identify Jesus' true followers (Rev. 4–7). After seven trumpet warnings are sounded (Rev. 8–11), Satan—portrayed symbolically as a dragon-like beast—organizes his forces against God's people (Rev. 12–14). God responds by pouring plagues upon Satan's earthly kingdom, also known as spiritual "Babylon" (Rev. 15–18). After Jesus' return to earth, His people spend a thousand years with Him in heaven, where the judgment takes place, and then evil is completely annihilated (Rev. 19–20). Finally, the city of New Jerusalem comes down from heaven to the earth made new, where the saints dwell with the Lord forever (Rev. 21–22).

REVELATION'S "OPENING STORY"

Because the book's opening story (chapters 1 to 7) is foundational to understanding Revelation, let's take a closer look at it. Jesus is described as a High Priest, who is presently interceding for our sins in heaven. Knowing every detail of our lives, He

admonishes all of us to "overcome" (Greek, *nike*) temptation, just as He overcame (Rev. 3:21). How did He overcome every temptation? By total dependence on God's Word and complete submission to His will.

Next, John's vision draws our attention to the throne room in heaven, where Jesus is portrayed as a sacrificial Lamb, who has "prevailed" (*nike*) through the selfless act of sacrificing Himself to atone for humanity's sins (Rev. 5:5, 6). As He begins to open the "scroll-of-destiny"—shut tightly with wax seals, like a first-century Roman will—four horsemen are released upon the earth (Rev. 6:1–8). When their missions are complete, the faithful people of God have been separated from those who merely professed to know Jesus (Rev. 6:9–17).

As the story closes, John hears the number 144,000, which is associated with God's people, and sees a "great multitude" of saints (Rev. 7:4, 9). The saved people are standing with the Lamb before the throne of God (Rev. 7:15–17).

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

The opening story raises a number of

questions. How were the spiritually defective members in the churches transformed into victors? How does a Christian overcome temptations and sinful behaviors, as Christ asks them to do?

In his book *Victory in Christ: A Christ-Centered Approach to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, James L. Merrills explains that the answers to these questions are contained in the four horsemen's messages (Rev. 6:1–8). Read the verses in your Bible as we examine the biblical evidence.

WHITE. The symbolism in the first horseman points to Jesus' victory and the advancement of the gospel. In Revelation, white is always a symbol of godliness. The horseman is twice labeled a conqueror (*nike*), linking him with the churches on earth and the scroll-of-destiny in heaven (Rev. 3:21; 5:5). The crown (*stephanos*) is worn by victors—the Son of Man wears a golden *stephanos* in Rev. 14:14. Jesus' victory is the overarching theme of Revelation's opening story. The first horseman invites us to unite with Christ in advancing the good news of God's kingdom throughout the earth (Dan. 7:13, 14; Rev. 19:11–16).