

WHO RIDES THE WHITE HORSE?

Who hasn't heard of the mysterious "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"—those terrifying "doom's day" riders who go forth on their variously colored steeds wreaking havoc throughout the earth?

Commentators universally agree that the apocalyptic steeds and their riders are *symbols* of prophetically significant events or conditions; and most are in general agreement on the meanings of the red, black, and pale horses, and their riders.

But the rider of the *white horse*—first of the four—has been perhaps the most controversial of the formidable quartet. Some insist he is *Christ*, while others insist he is *Antichrist*, or some other ungodly force.

Popular evangelical author Hal Lindsey writes, "Who is the white horse rider? It's the Antichrist himself! In the symbology of the ancient world a white steed stood for conquest. When a victor triumphantly entered a newly conquered kingdom he would invariably ride a white horse. The conquering Antichrist carries with him a warrior's bow, symbolizing his control over the weapons of war. On his head rests a crown, for he has succeeded in conquering more and more of the peoples of the earth. Eventually the whole world will claim him as its sovereign.

"It becomes obvious that the only person who could accomplish all these feats at this particular stage of the seven year Tribulation is the person called the Antichrist. He is the scintillating personality who will be personally indwelt by Satan and will have such spiritual magnetism that the whole world will actually worship him" (*There's a New World Coming: A Prophetic Odyssey*, Vision House, 1973, p. 103).

However popular Lindsey's interpretation, many commentators strongly disagree. David Chilton, in his com-

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Is he Christ?
"Antichrist"?
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mentary on the book of Revelation, writes, "Amazingly, this run-of-the-mill Dispensational interpretation claims that this rider on the white horse is the Antichrist. Showing where his faith lies, Hal Lindsey goes all the way and declares that the Antichrist is 'the only person who could accomplish all of these feats'" (*The Days of Vengeance*, Dominion Press, 1987, pp. 105,106).

Chilton states that several points "demonstrate conclusively" that the rider of the white horse "can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*, p. 106).

After presenting his position, Chilton continues, "St. John's first readers would immediately have understood his reference to this Rider with the Bow as speaking of Jesus Christ, on the basis of what we have already seen" (*ibid.*, p. 107).

Who is right? Lindsey, or Chilton? Or could it be that *neither* is right?

Let's find out.

The Key to Understanding Revelation

After having received the message to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3), John was taken, in vision, to the very throne room of Almighty God—to heaven itself—to stand in the midst of the angelic "elders" and "living creatures," and in the presence of the Supreme Majesty (chapter 4).

In his celestial vision, John saw "in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book [or scroll] written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals" (Revelation 5:1). John was to learn that the seven seals held the mysteries of the future—"things which must be hereafter" (Revelation 4:1)—and that the unveiling of those mysteries was not possible, unless someone was found worthy of loosing the seals.

But of all the mighty spirit beings who dwell in the presence of God—the majestic "elders," the magnificent "living creatures," the holy angels—*not one* was found worthy to loose the seals. Of all the great men ever to live—Abraham, Moses, the prophets, the apostles, great kings, men of valor—*not one* was worthy to loose the seals.

Finally, when all hope of peering into the future seemed lost, John learned that there *was* One, only One, who could loose the seven seals and unlock the mysteries of the future.

"And one of the elders said unto me [John], Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the elders, stood a *Lamb* [Greek: *arnion*, meaning "little lamb," or "lambkin"] as it had been slain [the sacrificial wounds were visible]....And He came and took the book out of the right hand

of Him that sat upon the throne.

"And when He had taken the book, the four beasts [living creatures] and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb....And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us [or *them*—the saints] to God by the blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us [them] unto our God kings and priests: and we [they] shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:5–10).

Fascinating! Of all the grandeur, majesty, splendor, and holiness exuded by the elders and living creatures, the only Being worthy of loosing the seals is described as a *little lamb* that, though living, bears sacrificial wounds in its body.

And here we find the vital *key* that unlocks the mysteries of the book of Revelation! Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who was slain for the sins of humankind, and who has prevailed over the evil powers that govern this world, has qualified to rule the world. *The future is in His hands, under His power!*

Before ascending to His place at His Father's right hand, Christ said to His disciples, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" (Matthew 28:18). Yes, ALL POWER! He is King of kings and Lord of lords, the Sovereign Ruler of the world to come! He alone is worthy of loosing the seals and revealing the events leading up to the establishment of His Kingdom!

In the very first verse of the book of Revelation, we read that it is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ...." Notice, the Revelation of *Christ*, not of John. John was merely the instrument through whom Jesus Christ gave the Revelation.

Therefore, if we are to understand the symbols of the book of Revelation—if we are to discover the identity of the rider of the white horse—we must look to Jesus Christ as our Source of understanding; we must allow Him to *reveal* the meaning

of the mysterious symbols of the book.

Rider of the White Horse

Now, let's turn our attention to Revelation the sixth chapter, and see what happens when Christ opens the first of the seven seals.

"And I [John] 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" (verses 1,2).

Notice several points: First, the rider is on a *white horse*. Second, he carries a *bow*. Third, a *crown* is given to him. And fourth, he goes forth *conquering*.

Many commentators believe these four points prove conclusively that the rider can be none other than Jesus Christ. Let's briefly examine this idea, and see if the description of the rider does indeed fit Christ.

Let's consider each point:

(1) The rider is on a *white horse*. In Revelation 19, Jesus is seen riding on a white horse.

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a *white horse*; and He that sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God....And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (verses 11–13,16).

(2) The rider carries a *bow*. In Old Testament imagery, the Lord sometimes uses a bow.

"Thy *bow* was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy Word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers....The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine *arrows* they went, and at the shining of thy glitter-

ing spear" (Habakkuk 3:7,11).

In a prophecy about Christ, the psalmist says, "Thine *arrows* are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee" (Psalm 45:5).

Some believe that the above prophecies provide the basis for John's description of the white horse rider. It would seem reasonable, then, that Christ would be seen with a bow.

(3) A *crown* (Greek: *stephanos*) is given to him. In Revelation 14, Christ is seen wearing a crown.

"And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden *crown* [*stephanos*], and in His hand a sharp sickle" (verse 14).

(4) He goes forth *conquering*. No one will deny that Christ is a Conqueror. As Chilton says, "It is Christ who is the Conqueror *par excellence*" (*The Days of Vengeance*, p. 188).

Christ promises, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also *overcame* [*conquered*], and am set down with my Father in His throne" (Revelation 3:21).

At His return, Christ will make war with the nations that oppose Him—He will *conquer* them.

Can you see why many conclude that the rider who carries a bow and rides a white horse is Jesus Christ? Whether we agree with this conclusion or not, we must admit one thing: *Whoever this rider is, he sure looks like Christ.*

And that's the key! He looks like Christ! He looks so much like Christ, in fact, that many think he *is* Christ!

Now, is there any prophecy in Scripture that someone, or something, Christ-like in appearance will arise on the scene before the end of the age?

Indeed, there is!

After Christ prophesied of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, His disciples asked, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world [Greek: *aion*, or "age"]?"

(Matthew 24:3).

Notice Christ's reply: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in *my name*, saying, I am Christ; and shall *deceive many*" (verses 4,5).

Later, in the same prophecy, Christ says, "And there shall arise *false Christs*, and *false prophets*, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (verse 24).

Notice, Christ says that *many* will come "*in my name*, saying, I am Christ"! This can be understood two ways: First, it can mean that many will come actually claiming to be Christ; second, it can mean that many will come "in the name of Christ," saying that *Jesus* is the Christ, but deceiving many!

What? How can one preach that Jesus is the Christ, and, at the same time, *deceive* many? Is it possible for a *false prophet* to preach that Jesus is Christ? Can one actually worship Jesus Christ *in vain*?

Listen to the words of Christ Himself: "Ye *hypocrites*, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But *in vain do they worship me...*" (Matthew 15:7-9).

But *how*? How can one worship Christ in vain?

Notice the latter part of verse 9: "...teaching for doctrines *the commandments of men!*"

So, yes, it is possible to worship Christ in *vain*, by teaching for doctrines the unscriptural commandments and traditions of men!

The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto *another gospel*: Which is not another: but there be some that trouble you, and would *pervert the gospel of Christ*. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than

that which we have preached unto you, let him be *accursed*. As we said before, so say I again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be *accursed*" (Galatians 1:6-9).

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are *false apostles*, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an *angel of light*. Therefore it is no great thing if his *ministers* also be transformed as the *ministers of righteousness*; whose end shall be according to their works" (II Corinthians 11:12-15).

Clearly, it is entirely possible to worship Christ in vain! And your Bible indicates that, before the close of this age, *many* will come preaching and prophesying in Christ's name, claiming that Jesus is the Christ, yet deceiving many.

Jesus says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. *Many* will say to me *in that day* [at His Second Coming], Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils [demons]? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you*: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Notice that these false prophets acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, saying "Lord, Lord..." and that they prophesy, cast out demons, and do "many wonderful works" in *His* name!

How many voices today are proclaiming the name of Christ? How many are claiming "many wonderful works" in His name? Is it possible that many of these are *false prophets*?

Not only is it possible, it is *prophesied!* They appear Christ-like—that is, they come in the name of "Christianity"—but they are

deceivers, preaching for doctrines the commandments and traditions of *men!*

Recall that the rider of the white horse (Revelation 6) *appears* Christ-like. He rides a white horse; he wears a crown; he goes forth "conquering, and to conquer"—all characteristics of the real Christ. *But he is not Christ!* He represents the *false Christs* and *false prophets* of whom Jesus prophesied!

While the white horse rider appears Christ-like, the differences between the rider of Revelation 6 and the Rider (who is unquestionably Christ) of Revelation 19 are significant. Unlike the former, the latter is "called Faithful and True," has eyes "as a flame of fire," wears "*many crowns*," is "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood," is called "The Word of God," has a "sharp sword" proceeding from His mouth, and has "on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

Remember, the white horse rider goes forth at the loosing of the *first* of the seven seals—he represents the *first* of the "things which must be hereafter." Recall also that Jesus Christ is the true Revelator who can reveal to us the true meaning of the symbols of the book of Revelation. The *first* thing the true Revelator mentions as a sign of His coming and the end of the age is the appearance of *deceivers* who come *in His name!*

"*Many*," He says, "shall come in my name...." The rider of the white horse does not symbolize a single "Antichrist"; he represents the many who come in the name of Christ, preaching and prophesying and performing "many wonderful works" in His name.

Many Antichrists

The book of Revelation speaks of two "antichrists" who will appear in the end-time. One is called the "beast"; the other is called the "false prophet." The beast is the political and military leader of the final stage of the "Holy Roman Empire," which will likely be

known as the "United States of Europe." The false prophet is the great *religious* leader who, in league with the beast, uses his powerful influence to sway millions.

But what about the so-called "Antichrist" who plays so prominent a role in the eschatological scenarios created by today's popular evangelical writers, and who is said to be represented by the white horse rider of Revelation 6?

The words *antichrist* and *antichrists* appear five times in four verses of the New Testament. Read each of them carefully:

First John 2:18: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that *antichrist* shall come, even now are there *many antichrists*; whereby we know that it is the last time."

First John 2:22: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is *antichrist*, that denieth the Father and the Son."

First John 4:3: "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of *antichrist*, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

Second John 1:7: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an *antichrist*."

Notice, "*many antichrists*," "*an antichrist*." These scriptures do not tell us that a single individual called "the Antichrist" will arise in the last days; rather, they warn of the *many antichrists* who were already active in the time of John!

It is true that a "man of sin"—an "antichrist," for sure—is prophesied to appear in the last days, prior to the Second Coming, but his "revealing" follows a "falling away" (II Thessalonians 2:3,4). No doubt, the falling away is the result of the false teachings of *many antichrists*!

The white horse rider does not portray specifically the "man of sin"; he symbolizes the many false Christs and false prophets, the apostate teach-

ers and pseudo-apostles who *precede* the "man of sin."

Having identified the rider of the white horse, we are now prepared to understand what the remaining three horsemen represent.

The Second, Third, and Fourth Seals

Turn again to Revelation the sixth chapter, and notice what occurs as Christ opens the second of the seven seals.

"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" (verses 3,4).

Note that this rider was to "take *peace* from the earth," and cause people to "kill one another." This is an obvious description of *war*. And that's the next thing, following false Christs, that Jesus foretells in His Olivet prophecy.

Christ says, "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).

Next, Christ opens the third seal, and John sees "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 *denarius* (translated "penny") was roughly equal to a full day's wage, indicating that the prices of the food items mentioned here are much higher than normal. The "pair of balances" indicates that foodstuffs are scarce and must therefore be carefully measured. Obviously, the black horse and rider symbolize *famine*.

And that's exactly what Jesus

mentions next in His Olivet prophecy. Notice: "...and there shall be *famines*, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matthew 24:7).

After famines, Jesus mentions *pestilences*—massive disease outbreaks, starvation, and death, following on the heels of famine. This fits the description of the horseman who appears at the opening of the fourth seal:

"And I looked, and behold a *pale* horse; and his name that sat on him was *Death*, and hell [Greek: *hades*] followed with him. And Power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:8).

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, then, represent (1) false Christs (or apostate Christianity), (2) wars and rumors of wars, (3) famines, and (4) pestilence and death, following on the heels of famine. "All these," Jesus says, "are the *beginning of sorrows*" (Matthew 24:8).

Actually, the above four represent a *pattern* that has repeated itself down through history. Often, *religion* lies at the root of *war*, and war often results in *famine*, which is always followed by massive disease outbreaks, starvation, and death.

All of these—apostasy, wars and rumors of wars, famine, and pestilences—were seen in the days of the apostles, before the sacking of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. The entire sequence of events—from the rise of false prophets within and without the church to the "great tribulation" that befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70—was a *type* of a yet future period of *global* turbulence.

Though it is true that the variously colored steeds of the Apocalypse have left their hoofprints scattered through the pages of history, the time is coming when all four horsemen will ride—and ride *furiously*—until they shake this earth to its foundations!

At the forefront will be the WHITE HORSE, and his bow-wielding rider.□