

The four horsemen of the Apocalypse

Paul Moore

The first four seals of Revelation 6 depict four horses operating upon the Roman Empire. Comparison with Zechariah 1 and 6 and other passages indicates that they represent angels operating under the direction of Christ.

TRADITIONALLY, Christadelphian expositions of the first four seals in Revelation 6:1-8 cast the white, red, black and pale horses as symbols of the Roman Empire in the period *circa* A.D. 96–303. However, there are a number of difficulties in accepting this interpretation of the horse symbol, not least being the disregard for the Old Testament background to the symbolism, and I would like to offer an alternative view of this symbol. It must be stressed at the outset, however, that the view offered in this article does not militate against the continuous-historic nature of the drama of the Revelation and its overriding 'Roman' context.

Are the horses Roman?

The equation between the horse and the Roman Empire is based upon the appearance of the horse in Roman coinage and heraldry as a symbol of Rome.¹ However, in expositional terms such a connection can never be a *basis* for interpretation. The basis must be solid Scriptural exposition; such details can only be appealed to secondarily as confirmatory 'icing on the cake'. If this process is reversed, there is a danger of jettisoning context and connections with other parts Scripture to force a match between the symbol and the presumed subject. Yet, consequent upon this equation, with the exception of the first seal, the riders of the horses are generally interpreted as the Roman emperors of the period, holding the reins of government and controlling the Roman horse.

However, the immediate context carries information that conflicts with such interpretations. It is clear that the horses and their riders are the *vehicles* whereby forces are brought to bear upon the Roman Empire. For example, in the second seal we are told: "And there went out another horse that was red: and *power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the [Roman] earth*, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword" (v. 4). The

rider is not inflicting wounds upon the horse, but rather upon the inhabitants of "the earth", a separate class. He rides forth on the horse for this purpose.

Similarly, we read concerning the fourth seal: "And I looked, and beheld 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 [Roman] earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth*" (v. 8). Again, the rider and his companion are given power to inflict judgement upon "the fourth part of the earth", not upon the horse.

Brethren Barker and Boulton, in their book *The Apocalypse and History* (first published in 1918), recognised this fact and suggested a modification to the established view. They saw the horses as symbols of the powers coming against the Roman Empire. They wrote:

"It has generally been assumed that this [the horse symbol] is intended to indicate that the events represented by the symbols were to take place within the Roman Empire. Roman coins bearing the figure of the horse and the word 'Roma' are referred to as supporting this view. There are grounds, however, for questioning the reasoning . . . The impression made upon the mind by the language of the seals is that the horses are in motion, moving over, and usually adversely affecting, a territory referred to as 'the earth', or 'the fourth part of the earth' . . . There would be something incongruous in representing a rider on the Roman Empire in full career over, or against, that Empire, and some other interpretation of the symbol is to be sought . . . *the horses of the first four seals cannot represent Rome, but certain forces which were to be in active operation against Rome* [emphasis P.M.] . . . the colours of the horses representing the character of the events rather than the state of the Empire. At the same time the Empire will be affected by those forces in the manner suggested by the colours used".²

1. For example, see J. Thomas in *Eureka*, vol. 2, pp. 131 (Logos edition).
2. pp. 27-9 (CMPA edition).

Whilst it is believed that this was a move in the right direction, it does not satisfactorily take account of the Old Testament background to the symbolism.

Old Testament background

Coloured horses first feature in the prophecy of Zechariah chapters 1 and 6. In both places the prophet enquires of his angelic guide as to their identity. He receives the following explanations:

"These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth" (1:10);

"These are the four spirits [mg. winds] of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth" (6:5).

In chapter 6 the horses draw chariots and are said to "go forth" into the territories of various Gentile powers. There is a similarity in the effects of their mission in both chapters; they cause God's spirit to be quieted in the north country in 6:8 and cause the earth to sit still and be at rest in 1:11.

Whether these passages refer to past activities of the angels (*cf.* 2 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 104:3,4) or the future work of Christ and the saints matters not in the context of this article. The point we want to establish is that the horses represent the *agents sent forth by God to accomplish His will among the nations*. They do not represent the powers that are the recipients of God's judgements. Confirmatory of this conclusion, there are a number of other scriptures that speak of angelic activity in terms of horses and chariots; for example, 2 Kings 2:11,12; 6:17; 13:14 and Isaiah 31:3 (where there is an implicit contrast between the horses of Egypt and Yahweh's horses).³

There is no good reason why the clear definitions of the coloured-horse symbolism given in Zechariah should be abandoned when we come to Revelation 6. The Scriptures evidently intend us to make the connection; the symbolism occurs nowhere else in this precise form.⁴

What do the horses signify?

On the basis of Zechariah, the four horses of Revelation 6 are "the four spirits [mg. winds] of the heavens,"⁵ which *go forth* from standing before the Lord of all the earth" (Zech. 6:5). Thus we read in Revelation 6 that the white horse "*went forth*" (v. 2) and the red horse "*went out*" (v. 4) from Christ into the earth. Certainly, in this context, the subject matter relates to past history, and therefore the horses and their riders must be

symbolic of *angelic* activity in manipulating the elements and nations.⁶

The vision of the resurrected and glorified Messiah in chapter 5 portrays him as "a Lamb . . . having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God *sent forth into all the earth*" (v. 6; *cf.* Zech. 1:10; 4:10; 6:5). This is a symbolic depiction of the fact that "*angels and authorities and powers [are now] subject unto him*" (1 Pet. 3:22). The colours of the horses and the accoutrements of the riders denote the *character and effects* of the judgements inflicted upon the Roman earth by the angelic horse rider.

The exposition set out above goes some way to furnishing a satisfactory solution to the otherwise difficult question as to why the four beasts (Gk. *zōa*, 'living creatures') are only mentioned in connection with the first four seal-horses, and not the fifth and sixth seals. Different living creatures in turn invite John to "come and see" the activities of the four horsemen in verses 1, 3, 5 and 7 of Revelation 6. The description of these four beasts given in 4:6,7 identifies them with the "living creatures" (Heb. *hayot*) of Ezekiel 1:5ff. We are told in Ezekiel 10:20 that these living creatures are "the cherubims".

The noun *cherub* is derived from the Hebrew verb *rachav*, which signifies 'to ride'.⁷ Thus a cherub is spoken of in Scripture in terms of a *chariot* upon which God rides to execute His purpose (*cf.* Ps. 18:10). (Note the association in this verse between "cherub" and "the wind", which

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3. Habakkuk 3:8,15 speaks concerning the future work of Christ and the saints in similar terms. This is in harmony with the apostle's teaching in Hebrews 2:5 that "unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come". Those who will be made "equal unto the angels" (Lk. 20:36) will take over the function of God's horses and chariots from the heavenly host.
 4. While J. Thomas does refer in *Eureka* to Zechariah in his exposition of the horses of seals 1-4, he does so simply to interpret the significance of their colours. He does not explore the possibility that the horses in Revelation 6 are in fact the same entities or have the same function. See *Eureka*, vol. 1, pp. 79-80, and vol. 2, pp. 139-40 (Logos edition).
 5. This connection between the first four seals and the four winds is of more than passing interest because the first four trumpet judgements of Revelation 7 and 8 are explicitly spoken of in such terms; see 7:1-3 and note the linkage with angelic activity.
 6. A comparison of verses 8 and 11 of Zechariah 1 identifies the rider of one of the red horses as "the angel of the LORD".
 7. See J. Thomas in *Phanerosis*, pp. 95-6 (Logos edition).

forms a link with Zechariah 6:5.) 1 Chronicles 28:18 refers to "the chariot of the cherubims", and in Ezekiel 1:15ff. the cherubim have wheels, and a representation of the glory of God sits enthroned as a rider above them. This concept of the cherubic chariot connects with Zechariah 6, where the coloured wind-horses pull chariots (Heb. *merkavah*, which is also cognate with *rachav*).

Thus it is fitting that in Revelation 6 each horse of the first four seals is similarly associated with a cherubic chariot/living creature.

The book of Revelation, like its companion the prophecy of Daniel, thus yields a far-reaching insight into the angelic ministry. It is hoped that this article will assist in a better appreciation of this exalted theme.

Out of the earth

News from the world of archaeology

New evidence of ancient Edom

DESPITE THE DISCOVERY by archaeologists of much that corresponds with the Biblical record, there is still a strong inclination by sceptical scholars to claim that the Bible is historically inaccurate in matters concerning which no archaeological evidence has been found. Thus, because no archaeological evidence had been found for the existence of the nation of Edom prior to about 800 B.C., it was commonly stated that references to Edom in the Biblical accounts of the reigns of David and Solomon were anachronistic; there was no nation of Edom in existence at that time.

Such statements have now been proved wrong by excavations at a site in Edom (now part of modern Jordan) called Khirbet en-Nahas (meaning 'Ruins of copper'). Here a team of archaeologists from the University of California at San Diego have dug up the remains of fortifications, metal production plants and other buildings which they have dated to the period 1200 to 900 B.C. This covers the period of David and Solomon, during which David conquered Edom

and Solomon suffered opposition from Edom (1 Kgs. 11:14-16), and would also cover the time of Saul, who warred against Edom (1 Sam. 14:47). The Biblical history of Edom, of course, goes back well before that, for there was a kingdom of Edom during the time of Israel's wilderness journey (Num. 20:14).

One interesting link between the recent discoveries and the Biblical record is that the excavators found Egyptian scarabs at the site. The record in 1 Kings 11 goes on to say that Solomon's Edomite adversary Hadad, who was of the royal family, had found refuge in Egypt as a child, eventually marrying Pharaoh's sister-in-law. Evidently there were early links between Edom and Egypt, probably over the trading of metals.

Source: News item in *Dispatch from Jerusalem*, May/June 2005.

Has Emmaus been discovered?

THE account in Luke 24 of Jesus accompanying two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, and revealing his identity over a meal when they got there, is a very well-known Bible story which has captured the imagi-

nations of many people. It has been the subject of paintings by famous artists and allusions in literary works, and an Internet search reveals that this place has given a name to a whole host of religious communities, retreats and welfare initiatives.

But where was Emmaus? The traditional locality, near Latrun on the Jerusalem to Tel Aviv highway, is too far away, and evidence is lacking for other sites, causing scholars to take the view that its location will never be discovered. A book has recently been published, however, claiming that the true site of Emmaus has now been found. It is called *The Emmaus Mystery: Discovering Evidence for the Risen Christ* (published by Continuum at £18.99) and is by Carsten Peter Theide, a German scholar who died in December 2004 at the early age of 53. Theide was an unorthodox scholar who caused controversy by dating the Gospels much earlier than most scholars have done.

Theide investigated the claims of a place now called Qaloniyyeh, a site which Josephus identifies as Emmaus, and located on the western outskirts of Jerusalem. After studying all available material, such as aerial photographs and maps, he concluded that Josephus was right. He