

DISCOVERIES

By Mark Finley

19

Revelation's Four Galloping Horsemen and the Answer to Why So Many Denominations

It's a JUNGLE out there! Protestants are now divided into over 200 major denominations. And most of these church organizations are further sub-divided into many groups. There are, for example, twenty different kinds of Baptists alone. An Anglican bishop once said, "Divided Christendom is a source of weakness in the West. In *non-Christian* lands it is a . . . stumbling block"—referring to the confusion faced by new believers in *Hindu* or *Buddhist* or *Muslim* lands who, when they decide to follow Christ, must choose between scores of denominations competing for their allegiance. Sooner or later everyone faces a disturbing question: Why so many denominations? If Christ is supposed to bring people together, why have His followers split into so many factions? Why do *so many* different groups claim to be the One True Church?

God gives some good answers in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 6—specifically a vision of Christian history in a scroll unsealed by Christ, the Lamb. As the scroll unrolls, FOUR HORSES gallop across the sky representing FOUR SUCCESSIVE AGES in the history of the church . . .

The WHITE Horse of Purity & Victory – Revelation 6:2 says, "I looked, and behold, a WHITE horse. And he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." White is a symbol of purity. The rider of the white horse held a bow, wore a victor's crown, and rode out as a conqueror in the earliest days of the Christian church. The Early Church, with Jesus as its general, marched into the citadels of Satan and conquered. The early church was faithful, even in the face of persecution. In the end, these people overwhelmed even the might of the Roman Empire. **Colossians 1:23** makes this incredible statement regarding the success of New Testament Christianity: "the gospel which you heard . . . was preached to every creature under heaven." This period of apostolic purity and power lasted to about A.D. 100.

The RED Horse of Fierce Persecution – Revelation 6:4 says: "Another horse, fiery RED, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword." This period of fierce persecution dates from about A.D. 100 to 313. Satan, seeing the Christian faith conquering hearts and minds, roused pagan emperors to stamp it out. Believers were burned at the stake, thrown to lions, torn apart on the rack—a great bloody sword was lifted over the church. But remarkably enough, the church kept growing. The world saw Christians willing to DIE for their faith. And the world took notice. It was an argument hard to ignore.

The BLACK Horse of Compromise & Corruption – Pagan persecution failed to destroy the Christian church. So Satan, changing his strategy, decided to attack it from the INSIDE. Revelation 6:5 says: "I looked, and behold a BLACK horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand." If the color white implies *purity* of faith, black represents *corruption* of that faith. The rider carries a pair of scales, or balances, picturing the church as "weighed in the balance and found wanting." In this period Satan *infiltrated* the church. Pagan

beliefs and practices crept into the church and were accepted as part of the faith! God's Word was replaced with more and more tradition. The church became very powerful in the middle ages, as powerful as the Roman Empire once had been. It boasted great cathedrals and wielded absolute authority over believers. All kinds of pagans, who'd worshipped Zeus or Caesar before, now wanted to join the Christian church. Unfortunately, many church leaders made the transition easier by allowing the new members to hang onto pagan ideas, images, and customs. The Second Commandment's clear teaching NOT to make or bow before images—**Exodus 20:4-5**—was simply deleted from church teaching.

Sun worship also had a very strong hold on the people of the Roman Empire. And it didn't wither away when pagans began calling on the name of Jesus. So church officials, to make sun-worshippers feel more at home in the Christian church, forbade all work on Sunday. What most people don't realize now is that the seventh day, Saturday, REMAINED the Christian day of worship for some time after Christ's death. That was the Sabbath for early believers. There is certainly no evidence for the change of the day of worship in the New Testament. Church officials said: After all, Sunday was the day of the Lord's resurrection. But were pagans who joined the church really worshipping Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord? Or were they really still worshipping the sun? In the middle of the fifth century, we find Pope Leo I rebuking worshippers at St. Peter's because they kept turning around and bowing toward the sun before entering the basilica! Mixing pagan customs with Christian teaching greatly weakened the church spiritually.

The PALE Horse of Spiritual Death – Revelation 6:8 says: "I looked, and behold, a PALE horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth." A corpse is riding a pale horse. Compromise has become spiritual death. By A.D. 538, church councils took the place of the Bible and church leaders became substitute messiahs. This period is known as the Dark Ages. Stagnation was widespread: the arts didn't flourish; scholarship and learning were repressed. The church wielded the power of the state. The Inquisition was one horrible example of religion using force to maintain orthodoxy. *Outwardly* the church was splendid and majestic and influential. But *inwardly*, there was widespread death and decay. This whole panorama of prophecy took 400 years, from about A.D. 100 to 500—a long period of decline. Many wondered: would God's light of truth ever shine again? Jesus promised in **Matthew 16:18**: "I will build My church, and gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Error would not triumph forever. God's truth did indeed rise again, championed by brave men and women.

As people were coming out of the Dark Ages, God didn't pour out ALL truth on one person but used MANY reformers to restore truth. He blessed people like the WALDENSES with the idea of God's Word as the foundation of faith. He showed JOHN HUSS that obedience to God must take precedence over obedience to the church. He showed Martin Luther the wonderful truth of justification by faith. The ANABAPTISTS rediscovered the truth of adult baptism by immersion. JOHN WESLEY rediscovered the truth of sanctification, of how the Spirit works in our lives. Early ADVENTISTS rediscovered the truth of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. New churches, new denominations formed around the people who made these discoveries and around the new light rediscovered.

That's why we have many different denominations. Each one celebrates a particular rediscovery of truth. But here's where the problem lies. God longs to restore all of His truth to His people at end time. He wants us to keep going, to keep making discoveries. God has more light to give us. But churches tend to remain static. Lutherans, of course, just want to talk about what Luther taught; Methodists, what Wesley taught, and so on. It's *good* to preserve important truths, but it's not good to build a wall around them and just stop there. God's intends that each generation accept the truths of earlier generations until the *entire* Truth of God's Word is restored. God's plan is to gather a remnant people from all churches and join them together in a final movement that will restore ALL of His truth.

THE BIBLE SAYS

- 1 Timothy 3:15** The apostle Paul defines God’s church as “the pillar and ground of the TRUTH.”
- John 17:17** Jesus prays that His people will be sanctified by *His Word, His truth* in every age.
- Revelation 6:1-8** John the Revelator, in the symbolism of the FOUR HORSEMEN, describes the advance of God’s truth—and Satan’s attempt to DESTROY it.

■ White Horse:	APOSTOLIC PURITY & VICTORY	A.D. 31 – A.D. 100
■ Red Horse:	FIERCE PERSECUTION	A.D. 100 – A.D. 313
■ Black Horse:	COMPROMISE & CORRUPTION	A.D. 313 – A.D. 538
■ Pale Horse:	SPIRITUAL DEATH	A.D. 538 – A.D. 1500

- Daniel 8:12** Predicts God’s truth would be “cast down to the ground.”
- 2 Thess. 2:3-7** Predicts there would be “a falling away” or departure from the truth.
- Isaiah 58:12-14** There’s been a breach, a break in the wall of God’s Ten Commandments which the Lord says will be repaired.
- Jude 3** Urges us to “EARNESTLY CONTEND for the faith once delivered to the saints.”
- Revelation 14:6-7** Shares the good news that the everlasting gospel would be proclaimed to the ends of the earth.
- Revelation 12:17** Describes a people called the “remnant”—those who remain loyal to God—who keep His commandments in the last days.
- Revelation 14:12** Describes a people who will keep God’s commands and be filled with the faith of Jesus.
- Isaiah 8:20** Warns us not to accept the teachings of those who lead away from obedience to His Law and His Word.
- Matthew 16:18** “I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall NOT prevail against it.”
- John 10:16** Jesus has “other sheep” in all the different churches and denominations. They shall hear His voice, “and there shall be one fold, and ONE Shepherd.”

Quick Quiz

Our heavenly Father has *so much* He longs to teach us! Think of each seminar session as one in a series of steps leading upward—a series of “lessons from heaven.” May we learn our lessons well, so we in turn can teach others. God’s Word, the Bible—our Textbook for this seminar—offers **Learning Unlimited!**

#19 - Revelation’s Four Galloping Horsemen and the Answer to Why So Many Denominations

1. T In the apostolic era of the early church, God’s truth successfully spread very rapidly and
F very broadly, over most of the then-known world.

To check your answer, see Acts 2:41, 4:4, 6:7; Philippians 4:22, Colossians 1:23.

2. In the panoramic view of church history God gave John, the *fourth* period was symbolized by a horse of _____ color, and the rider “that sat on him was _____ , and _____ followed with him”—signifying the condition of *spiritual death* in the church!

To check your answer, see Revelation 6:8.

3. Taking a stand for Christ and His truth often calls for courage, but God’s Word still urges, “Ye should earnestly contend for the _____ which was _____ delivered unto the saints.” As Peter fearlessly told authorities trying to intimidate him, “We ought to obey _____ rather than _____ .”

To check your answer, see Jude 3 and Acts 5:29.

4. When Paul warns about “grievous _____ . . . not sparing the flock,” he refers to Satan’s attacks from **OUTSIDE** the church, by persecution. When He warns church leaders or “overseers” that “*of your _____ selves* shall men arise, speaking _____ things, to draw away disciples after them,” he refers to Satan attacking the church from *within*, by corruption of its leaders and its doctrines.

To check your answer, see Acts 20:28-30.

5. Sadly, God refers to corruption from within when He says that even “_____ have violated My Law, and have *profaned Mine holy things*: they have *put no difference* between the holy and the profane, neither have they shown difference between the _____ and the clean, and have _____ their _____ from My Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.”

To check your answer, see Ezekiel 22:26.

A Thought for Today

John 10:16

And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.