

Grizzled Horses in Zechariah – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Zechariah 1:8 I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that *were* in the bottom; and behind him *were there* red horses, **speckled**, and white.

Zechariah 6:3 And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grizzled and **bay horses**.

Zechariah 6:7 And **the bay** went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth. (KJB)

Zechariah 1:8 I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him *were* horses: red, **sorrel**, and white.

Zechariah 6:3 with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses – **strong steeds**.

Zechariah 6:7 Then **the strong steeds** went out, eager to go, that they might walk to and fro throughout the earth. And He said, "Go, walk to and fro throughout the earth." So they walked to and fro throughout the earth. (NKJV)

The color of the horses is very significant. Red in the Scriptures is the color for war and bloodshed (as in Rev. 6:4). As Jesus is on a red horse, we are looking in the fullest prophetic scope to His second advent at which time He will come in His Kingdom Glory to judge and to make war (cp. Rev. 19:11; Isa. 63:1-6). The immediate context is dealing with Jerusalem's enemies in Zechariah's day.

White horses in the Scriptures speak of victory or triumph (Rev. 6:2, 19:11). The third color of horse present is said to be speckled here, in other places they are referred to as dappled or grizzled (hail spotted). Grizzled is from grizzly which means pale but spotted.

In the 8th vision, Black horses are mentioned as also being present (6:2, 6 & 8). The black horse is again referred to in Revelation 6:5-6, where it represents FAMINE (cp. Jer. 14:1-2, Lam. 5:10).

Here, as in Zechariah 6, the dappled or grizzled horse (spotted, speckled, splotched or blotched) symbolically represents wholesale death from sources OTHER than just war and famine, such as, plagues, pestilence, epidemics etc. (cp. Rev. 6:8 - in Ezekiel 14:21 sword, famine, beasts and pestilence are listed). Now the color of this horse as described here and in other Scriptures has been widely discussed by various commentators, many of the newer translations, and some of the older translations. Sometimes the various Hebrew words (*seruqqim*, *'amots*, etc.) are rendered "sorrel or bay".

Many of the commentators and translators are confused by this, thinking that they are all different horses symbolizing something different each time but this is not so. Some of the reasons for the confusion are, firstly – that the Hebrew words rendered "sorrel" or "bay" are not well understood, secondly – most translators and commentators know little about horses, and thirdly – a propensity within such men to "correct" or change the King James Bible. The following are offered for consideration:

- (1) the Hebrew words may sometimes refer to a breed of horse irrespective of color. For instance, the word "Appaloosa" invariably brings to mind a predominately reddish brown horse with a blanket on one of its flanks that is white with black spots. But this is not necessarily true at all. Some Appaloosas are almost pure black in color, others are even basically gray with white splotches all over them (or white with gray).
- (2) or that the Hebrew word "*seruqqim*" (<yqrc, from root "*saruq*", Strongs #8320) which occurs only here in the entire O.T., is being used as a descriptive adjective as could also be the case in chapter 6, verses 3 and 7, where the Hebrew "*'amots*" (<yXma, Strongs #554) is used. Gesenius, the noted

German Hebrew authority (professor at Halle, died Oct. 23, 1842), renders "active" or "nimble" as possible meanings for *'amots*. Others add to these "swift", "fleet", and "strong".

Hence, a type or breed of horse or even a physical attribute may sometimes be that which is being referred to, whereas on other occasions when a different word is recorded, the color of that breed is being described. The **context** will militate as to the best solution. When the horse is being described as grizzled, speckled, spotted, dappled ect., it just means that it is basically a pale horse – a pale white horse that has whitish or grayish spots or blotches on it. "*Seruqqim*" then, does not mean sorrel here, as some so construe.

In any case, the color intended to describe these horses is assured, as that color is clearly given in other Scripture by using other words whose meanings are certain. Even the spurious LXX concurs, translating "*seruqqim*" into "gray and piebald" (Piebald means: of different color, spotted or blotched, composed of incongruous parts).

The significance of the color is that **IT IS DESCRIPTIVE OF THE SKIN CONDITION** (ie: blotched, spotted etc.) of the victims of the various plagues and epidemics which these horses symbolize (cp. Lev. 13:2,4,10,14-16,19,24,42,49, and 14:37). These are the same horses mentioned in connection with the fourth chariot in Zec. 6:3 & 6:6 which go toward the south, and they equate to the "pale" horse of Rev. 6:8 (here, the Greek word is "*chloros*" {κλωρο}, Strongs #5515} which means pale, greenish, or yellowish – its Hebrew equivalent is "*yeraqraq*" (qrqry, Strongs #3422); cp. Lev. 13:49; 14:37 and also the LXX).

The colors of the horses have the same meanings here as in the first vision (Zec. 1:7-17). Again, **red** symbolizes war and bloodshed, **black** designates death by famine, **white** speaks of victory and/or triumph, and **dappled or grizzled** etc. denotes pestilence, epidemic and/or plague.

The number "four" points to the UNIVERSALITY of the judgment (cp. Isa. 11:12 "the four corners [quarters] of the earth") and the whole "Beast system" political structure of "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24), as prefigured by the four empires of Daniel's colossus vision (Dan. 2:36-45).¹

The four horses are connected with the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:1-8), who appear in the same context of judgment and destruction of wicked men.

A direct connection is seen between these four colored horses and Ezekiel 14:21 where the four judgments there are given as sword, famine, beast and pestilence (cp. Jer. 15:2,3; 43:11; Ezk. 5:2,12; Rev. 6:8). The sword compares to the red horse (war, bloodshed); the famine to the black horse; plague and pestilence to the pale or grizzled horse (as people's skin is blotched by various plagues - Lev. 13); and the beast to the white horse upon whom "The Beast" comes forth impersonating the True Conqueror and Overcomer (Rev. 6:2 cp. 6:8). Also note that the Gentile kingdoms are likened unto wild rapacious beasts - Dan.7). The connection of Ezk. 14:21 to Zec. 6 and Rev. 6 is, though only circumstantial evidence, another piece to the puzzle solidifying the correct identity of the white horse rider in Rev. 6:2 as being that of the Anti-christ.

Hence, these visions portray four horns, or foreign powers, that ruled over and scattered Israel (1:18-19), four carpenters who brought judgment on these horns (1:20-21) and now four means through which these judgments came – **sword, famine, beast and pestilence**.

At Zechariah's request (v.4) the interpreting angel explained the significance of the horses with their chariots. The directions that are assigned for the chariots to go toward are given with Jerusalem as the reference point (v.6). As already noted, the horses symbolize earth judgments,

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. II, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), pp. 1995-1996; also see p. 1965.

and the chariots with their accompanying angels are the ministers of God who will carry out these judgments.

- The black horses (death by famine) were sent to the north from whence direction Israel's worst enemies throughout history came (the Assyrians, Babylonians, Seleucids, and Romans), and from which her end-time foes – the king of the north (Ezk. 38-39; Dan. 11:40b-45) as well as the Antichrist and his hordes (Rev. 16:13-16), will burst forth.
- The white horses follow after the black to the north (v.6) to consummate special judgment in that sector because of the terribly cruel atrocities inflicted on Israel from that quarter. Those punishments will be culminated by the triumphant returning Messiah (Rev. 16:13-16; 19:11-19), symbolized by the white horse's Rider in Rev. 19:11. The most immediate context demands that "the north country" is primarily referring to Babylon which is reached by beginning due north and then through the fertile crescent to the east. This interpretation is consistent with the previous vision in which "wickedness" in the symbol of a woman had been transplanted to Babylon (Zec. 5:5-11; cp. Rev. 18:2,10,21; Rev. 19:1-3).
- The grizzled (hail spotted, piebald or blotched) are dispatched to the south in the direction of Israel's ancient foes, Egypt and Edom.

Immediate partial fulfillments of this vision occurred shortly thereafter. The "remnant" had just been delivered from Babylonian domination through God's judgment on that nation by Cyrus. But though conquered by Cyrus, Babylon revolted in the fifth year of Darius Hystaspes who in turn devastated and depopulated the country. As for Egypt, it revolted against Darius and was conquered by Xerxes I in 485 B.C. and, again, after continued rebellion, by Ochus in 340 B.C. Alexander took it from the Persians in 332 B.C.

Nothing is said directly of horses going east and west, because the "Great Sea" (the Mediterranean) lay to the west and the Arabian Desert on the east. But because the scope of this and ALL the night visions is worldwide, all four chariots will encircle the globe after judgment is specifically visited upon the north and south.

- It should be noted that the red horses (v.2) seemingly are assigned no mission here (vs.6-8) and that the bay horses are separated from the grizzled, whereas in verse 3 they appear to be together. The best solution is that the black, white and the grizzled are referring to the second, third and fourth chariots respectively which are sent on specific missions (v.6), and that the Hebrew word 'amots used here in verse 7 (the word bay) is a synonym, or at least nearly so, further describing the hue of the red horses in verse 2. The context of verse 7 demands that the bay is a reference to the red horses which are drawing the first chariot of verse 2. This determination is confirmed by noting that the horses in verse 7 are assigned to go to and fro throughout the whole earth (its four quarters - also note that to & fro are mentioned three times in verse 7 signifying emphasis - hence, importance to this assignment) indicative that war and bloodshed will hold sway over all the world. This is also true of the red horse rider in Rev.6:4. The time period for this chariot judgment is that of "the times of the Gentiles", which were initiated in 606 B.C. (Luk. 21:24; cp. Mat. 24:6-7).²

Though the same Hebrew word, 'amots, is used in verse 3 with respect to the grizzled horses of the fourth chariot, it is not meant that some of the horses pulling the fourth chariot are "bay" (red) and others grizzled. All of the horses pulling the fourth chariot are grizzled (dappled, blotched, etc.).

² An alternative interpretation, though considered unlikely, is that 'amots (bay) is intended to be an adjective denoting strength. Thus the meaning would be the "strong, red" horses went forth (or even possibly strong red as to color). Still possible, but yet less probable, is that here the word is intended to convey the type or breed of the red colored steeds.

This is clearly seen in verse 6 when this team is again referred to and they are said to only be "grizzled". This is confirmed by the mention of the color of similar steeds in Zec. 1:8 and Rev. 6:8.

We understand verse 3 to mean that the hail spots, dapples or blotches on these pale, grizzled, etc. horses have a small amount of "bay" or red present (as in "fleabitten" dappled horses) as might well be the case of the condition of the skin of a person with some plague (which is what these horses portray - for BIBLICAL CONFIRMATION see Lev. 13 especially verses 2,4,10,14-16,19,24,42,49 and 14:37 - note the use of such terms with reference to skin color as "bright spot, white bright spot, **RAW** flesh, white and somewhat **REDDISH**, white, white **REDDISH** sores, greenish or **REDDISH**"). We consider the cited references from Leviticus as irrefutable and conclusive proof as to the color of the grizzled et. al., horses and also to the interpretation placed upon the meaning of these particular horses in Scripture. The result is a uniform interpretation regardless of the Hebrew or Greek word used and a vindication of the King James Version's handling of the problem.

Although it is possible that in this context the word *'amots* is denoting that the grizzled horses are further being described as strong, fleet or nimble, etc. (the Hebrew word *'amots* is only used in vs.3 and 7 in the entire Old Testament); in view of all that has been said above, we consider this to be highly unlikely, and that the matter has been forever solved and laid to rest.

In any case, the duty assignments to the four chariots with its specific colored team of horses is certain.