

Symbolic horses of Joel 2 and Revelation 9

by Douglas E. Cox

Several prophecies, including Joel 2, Revelation 9 & 19 speak of armies of horses, and horsemen. They are not literal horses, but figurative.

In Joel ch. 1 the invaders have lions' teeth.

Joel 1:5-6

Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion.

In Revelation, the horses of the 2nd woe have lions' heads.

The people in Joel 2:2 are "without number." They are described as unique.

Joel 2:2

A great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

This great army is depicted in the wilderness, anticipating entry to paradise.

Joel 2:3

A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

Christians seek to enter the better country of the gospel, [Hebrews 11:16] and the heavenly Jerusalem.

The people of Joel 2 appear like horses, and horsemen.

Joel 2:4

The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run.

They are called 'God's army'.

Joel 2:11

And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

If the people repent, God promises to remove the invading army, which is referred to as 'the northern army'.

Joel 2:20

But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things.

In Joel's prophecy, horses have a symbolic meaning similar to locusts. The heads of locusts and grasshoppers resemble the heads of miniature horses. These are two metaphors that in prophecy, represent God's people. Both figures are from the period following Israel's Exodus from Egypt.

Joel refers to the invading army as "the heathen" who reign over God's people.

Joel 2:15-18

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people.

Zion is not the earthly Jerusalem, but is now the heavenly mount Zion, the church. [Hebrews 12:22]

The basis for locust imagery in prophecy is the report of the spies who Moses had sent to survey the promised land after the Exodus. Ten of the spies brought an evil report. They compared themselves to grasshoppers, and the people who dwelt in the land they described as giants. These spies reported, "we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." [Numbers 13:33]

Paul said the experience of the Israelites in Moses' day happened for our examples, i.e., for the benefit of believers. The experience of Christians is comparable to that of the Israelites. The

Israelites who lacked faith to enter the promised land wandered in the wilderness for the rest of their lives. Christians who lack faith are also represented by locusts in prophecies such as Joel 1-2 and in the first and second woe in Revelation 9. Horses and horsemen are especially featured in the second woe, Revelation 9:13-19. In the present age, the church is in a spiritual wilderness, in the place prepared for her by God, [Revelation 12:6, 14] where she is nourished with the spiritual manna of the Scriptures. Her wilderness is a place of trial and testing and preparation for the "better country." [Hebrews 11:16]

The psalmist identified the chariots of God with angels.

Psalm 68:17

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

The number mentioned in this verse may be connected to the number of horses of the 2nd woe: 200,000,000.

Horses in both Joel's prophecy, and in Revelation 9, represent people who lack understanding. David wrote:

Psalm 32:9

Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

Jeremiah compared the people of Israel to horses. He wrote:

Jeremiah 5:8

They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife.

For Jeremiah, horses represent those who follow their own way, and do not repent. He wrote:

Jeremiah 8:6

I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.

Lions' heads represent the natural mind of man, and our carnal nature, opposed to the things of God. David wrote:

Psalm 22:13

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

He prayed that God would save him from the lion's mouth.

Psalm 22:21

Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

Jesus used animals as metaphors referring to people; specifically, sheep, serpents, dogs, fish, birds.

Peter used the expression "natural brute beasts" in reference to false teachers in the Church.

2 Peter 2:12

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

He spoke of unfaithful Christians as like animals:

2 Peter 2:22

But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

James compared man's *tongue* with animals, and said that whereas every kind of animal had been tamed, no man could tame his own tongue. He wrote:

James 3:1-9

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of gehenna. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

In Revelation 14, John refers to bridles, and bits in the mouths of horses. The depth of blood from the winepress of God's wrath reaches to the horses' bridles.

Revelation 14:19-20

The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

What are these horses, and what are their bridles? The winepress of God's wrath is not a literal winepress, and the grapes are not humans. I suggest that the horses in the prophecy are

metaphors that signify people, and their bits and bridles signify their words, and speech. The blood from the winepress is another metaphor, since natural grapes do not produce blood. When Jesus established the new covenant, he identified wine with blood.

Luke 22:19-21

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

Perhaps the blood from the winepress in Revelation 14 alludes to the blood of the new covenant, and the teachings of the gospel; the winepress of God's wrath represents the gospel being taught to people who lack understanding, who are represented by horses.