

Many wonder why there are so many denominations throughout Christianity. They're perplexed because all claim to accept the same Bible and believe in the same God, and yet somehow they arrive at vastly different interpretations and denominational destinations. One would think that if any institution would speak with one voice on religious matters that it would be the church who claims to believe the Bible. In a world steeped in moral darkness and in desperate need of spiritual light, the church must be united in message and mission. It must provide solid answers and clear direction to aid people in their spiritual journey. These answers can only be derived from the great guide book—The Bible. Sadly, however, confusion exists in the Christian world! While this is a troublesome reality, one thing is certain, God is not the author of confusion! God has a church on earth that is distinct and distinguishable from all other churches, denominations, sects, and creeds. Let's study and learn why there are so many denominations. In so doing, we will be able to easily identify God's remnant church.

ONE CHURCH, NOT MANY

1. According to Colossians 1:18, of what is Christ the head?

"And he is the head of _____ _____, _____ _____: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." *Colossians 1:18*

2. Referring to the church, there are how many bodies?

"For as the body is _____, and hath many members, and all the members of that _____ _____, being many, are _____ _____: so also is Christ." *1 Corinthians 12:12*

Note: *The apostle Paul refers to the church of the living God as the body of Christ. He uses this analogy to indicate that the church is one united body comprised of many different members of which Christ is the head.*

THE SEALS AND THE LAMB

"We will find that the seals picture in symbols a series of religious events or conditions between the first and second coming of Jesus. The seven seals cover much the same period as the seven churches, only adding much valuable information." Tucker, J.L. *Study Notes on the Book of Revelation,* p. 51.

3. What did John the Revelator see in the right hand of God? With how many seals was the book sealed?

"And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne _____ _____ written within and on the backside, sealed with _____ _____." *Revelation 5:1*

4. What question did the strong angel loudly proclaim?

"And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____, and to _____ _____ _____ thereof?" *Revelation 5:2*

5. How many were found worthy to open the book and to look thereon?

3"And _____ _____ in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. 4And I wept much, because _____ _____ was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon." *Revelation 5:3, 4*

6. Who prevailed to open the book and loose the seven seals?

5"And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. 6And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." *Revelation 5:5, 6*

Note: *In Revelation 5, John the Revelator refers to Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb. Just as the lion is the king of the jungle indicating its strength and power, Jesus is the King of the universe prevailing with strength and power. He is also the Lamb who is worthy to loose the seven seals by virtue of His shed blood and victory on Calvary.*

7. What did the Lamb take out of the right hand of God seated upon his throne?

"And he came and took _____ _____ out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne." *Revelation 5:7*

Note: *John the Revelator depicts Jesus approaching His Father's throne and taking the book with the seven seals out of His right hand. Indeed, the Lamb of God is the only one who is worthy to take the book, open it, and loose the seven seals.*

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

Note: *The scenes of the four horses and riders of Revelation 6 deal directly with the different phases of the history of the Christian church. The church begins pure, but gradually departs from Bible truth.*

WHITE HORSE – PURITY
(A.D. 31 – 100)

8. Who opened the first seal and each seal thereafter? What is the color of the first symbolic horse that John saw in vision? What did the rider go forth to do?

[1]"And I saw when _____ _____ opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. [2]And I saw, and behold a _____ _____: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth _____, _____ _____ _____." *Revelation 6:1, 2*

Note: *As the Lamb opened the first seal, John saw a white horse gallop across the prophetic screen. The white horse symbolizes the church in the first century that went forth "conquering and to conquer." It symbolizes the purity of faith and doctrine that the church possessed in the apostolic age. The rider wearing a bow and crown represents conquest, victory, and triumph in the advancement of the gospel. In the first century, the gospel grew exponentially and was taken to the then known world (see Acts 5:14; Colossians 1:23). Nothing could stop the progress of the church, not even false apostles or teachers who sought to corrupt the church. Satan's strategy was to divert the church from its mission and lead it away from Jesus. The church eventually left its first love, but by in large, this was a pure and victorious period in the history of the church (Revelation 2:4, 5). This period in church history coincides with the church of Ephesus as described in Revelation 2:1-7.*

RED HORSE – PERSECUTION

(A.D. 100 – 313)

9. What is the color of the second symbolic horse that John saw in vision? What was the rider given power to take from the earth? What terrible condition occurred? What weapon did the rider have in his hand?

[3]"And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. [4]And there went out another _____ that was _____: and power was given to him that sat thereon to _____ _____ from the earth, and that they should _____ _____ _____: and there was given unto him _____ _____ _____." *Revelation 6:3, 4*

Note: *As the Lamb opened the second seal, John saw a red horse gallop across the prophetic screen. The period of the red horse symbolizes the violent persecution of the church. The rider had a sword in his hand and was given power to take peace from the earth! This bloody period was a reaction against the white horse period in which the gospel advanced in the first century. Satan couldn't divert the church from its mission, so now he decided to unleash his fury against the church. He was seeking to stamp out Christianity! Christians were fed to wild beasts, burned at the stake, maimed, and tortured to death. However, the more Satan persecuted the church, the more the church grew! Truly, the martyrs' blood became the seed of the gospel. The Lord encouraged the church to be faithful unto death, and that He would give them a crown of life. He also promised that they would not be hurt of the second death (Revelation 2:10, 11). This period in church history coincides with the church of Smyrna as described in Revelation 2:8-11.*

BLACK HORSE – COMPROMISE

(A.D. 313 – 538)

10. What is the color of the third symbolic horse that John saw in vision? What was in his hands?

[5]"And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a _____ _____; and he that sat on him had _____ _____ _____ _____ in his hand. [6]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*

Note: *As the Lamb opened the third seal, John saw a black horse gallop across the prophetic screen. The period of the black horse symbolizes the*

compromise of the church. The rider has a pair of balances in his hand representing food being weighed during a severe famine. It also represents the church being weighed in the balances and found wanting due to its compromised spiritual condition. A voice in the midst of the four beasts makes reference to food being hard to come by. A day's earning wages was "a penny." People could barely feed their family and were on the verge of starvation. In Revelation 6:6, the clear instructions were, "hurt not the oil and the wine." Some interpret the oil and wine as representing faith and love or the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus.

***Note:** During the 4th century, Christianity was legalized and state supported religion was instituted. The church headquarters were now at Rome! Tradition was elevated above the Word of God and corruptions such as penances, indulgences, sun worship, images and statutes had now surfaced in the church. The Roman emperor, Constantine, joined the church professing conversion. Before the Battle at Milvian Bridge, he claimed that he and his army saw a vision in the sky of a cross bearing the inscription "By this sign conquer." He marched his army through the river, declared them baptized, and ordered them to paint the letters on their shields. His army won the battle overwhelmingly, and he attributed his victory to the god of the Christian. Constantine enforced the first civil Sunday Law in 321 AD by ordering all courts of justice, workshops, and inhabitants of the towns to rest on Sunday. By 325 AD, the first church Sunday Law was in place, replacing the Bible Sabbath with the pagan's day of the sun. In 364 AD, at the Council of Laodicea, the Catholic Church established Sunday as the day of worship. It was now against the law for Christians to "Judaize" or evangelize on Saturday (the Sabbath). Christians were to refrain from being idle and commanded to work on Saturday. However, they were to refrain from work on Sunday and honor it as the Lord's Day. Satan's strategy was to compromise the church, and he did so by influencing powerful church and state leaders to unite and join together. This period in church history coincides with the church of Pergamos as described in Revelation 2:12-17.*

PALE HORSE – CORRUPTION

(A.D. 538 – 1500's)

11. What is the color of the fourth symbolic horse that John saw in vision? What is the name of the rider? Who followed him?

7"And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. 8And I looked, and behold a _____ _____: and his name that sat on him was _____, and _____ followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." *Revelation 6:7, 8*

Note: *As the Lamb opened the fourth seal, John saw a pale horse whose rider was named death gallop across the prophetic screen followed by hell—the grave. In this period, the church became morally corrupt. This is the period of the Dark Ages that lasted for 1260 years. The church was in open apostasy and fell from Bible truth. The pope was established as the head of all churches. Bibles were taken away from the people and burned in public squares. The only Bibles that were available were written in Latin and chained to pulpit desks. It was illegal to own a Bible, and only the priests could interpret the Bible to the people. A conservative figure of 50 million Christians were killed because they obeyed God's Word. Satan's strategy to corrupt the church was successful. This period in church history coincides with the church of Thyatira as described in Revelation 2:18-29.*

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION
(1517 – 1648)

"The Protestant Reformation was the 16th-century religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheaval that splintered Catholic Europe, setting in place the structures and beliefs that would define the continent in the modern era. In northern and central Europe, reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Henry VIII challenged papal authority and questioned the Catholic Church's ability to define Christian practice. They argued for a religious and political redistribution of power into the hands of Bible- and pamphlet-reading pastors and princes. The disruption triggered wars, persecutions and the so-called Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church's delayed but forceful response to the Protestants." http://www.history.com/topics/ reformation.

The Protestant Reformation was a widespread theological revolt in Europe against the abuses and totalitarian control of the Roman Catholic Church. Reformers such as Martin Luther in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, and John Calvin in France protested various unbiblical practices of the Catholic Church and promoted a return to sound biblical doctrine. The precipitating event of the Protestant Reformation is generally considered to be Luther's posting of his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church on October 31, 1517. https://www.gotquestions.org/Protestant-Reformation.html

Note: *A protestant protests the dogmas of the Catholic Church. God raised up Protestant Reformers who sought to reform Rome during the Dark Ages. The people followed the various Protestant Reformers as they systematically restored truths that were buried. Notice some of the truths restored: the Bible (the Waldenses), obedience (John Huss), salvation by grace (Martin Luther), freedom of conscience (John Calvin), and baptism (Anabaptists). When the reformers died, those in the various movements refused to go any further than the reformer did. They stopped progressing and became creed bound, mainly emphasizing the restored doctrinal point. Hence, multiple denominations were formed and still exist today.*

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING
(MID 1790's – 1840's)

The widespread belief in society was that the Second Advent of Christ was near. However, the prevailing belief was that before Christ returns the millennium of 1,000 years of peace on earth must occur first. Therefore, the goal was to bring about social reform and personal perfection. Many clergy preached against alcoholism. Educational reforms were made. The free public school system was shaped in the United States, and there was a drive to improve publicly funded schools. Societies for abolitionists were established for the purpose of abolishing slavery, war, and flesh eating. The American Vegetarian Society was established during this time. Charles Finney, the greatest evangelist and the "Billy Graham" of his day made reference to America being drunk on the millennium. Claudia Stokes in her book, *The Altar At Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth Century American Religion* referenced Charles Finney's statement from 1835 saying, "If the church will do her duty, the millennium may come in this country in three years" (p. 103). This was the climate in society. The popular understanding of the millennium was that the people were to attain perfection, experience 1,000 years of peace, and then Jesus would return. They had a "post-millennial" view of the second coming of Christ.

THE MILLERITE MOVEMENT
(1833 – 1844)

William Miller's preaching and the Millerite movement began in the aforementioned climate. The difference in his understanding was that Jesus would return at the beginning of the 1,000 year millennial period. In other words, he had a "pre-millennial" understanding of the second coming of Jesus. He believed that Jesus would return and then the 1,000 years of peace would occur. This provided an urgency to his message! The Millerite movement was a one doctrine movement. They believed in the visible, literal, pre-millennial return of Jesus in the clouds. They were called Adventists, not Seventh-day Adventists. Miller began to preach in the 1830's based on his understanding of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 which extended to the year 1844. His message took effect. Initially, he encouraged the people to stay in their churches. He had no intention of separating from the churches. However, as it got closer to the 1840's, the Millerites became more aggressive in their evangelistic efforts. Many pastors became resistant to their efforts and began to disfellowship the Millerites. William Miller and the Millerites believed that the cleansing of the sanctuary spoken of in Daniel 8:14 was the earth. This was the popular understanding of the day, and this understanding was accepted without question. Therefore, the Millerites taught that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844 to cleanse the earth by the fires of the last day. When

Jesus didn't return, they experienced the Great Disappointment! Many lost their way and gave up their faith. The Millerites had the prophetic date of Daniel 8:14 right, but their understanding of the event was wrong. Jesus has never revealed the day and hour of His second coming (Matthew 24:36). Something significant did occur on October 22, 1844. However, the special event that occurred was in the heavenly sanctuary, not on the earth. We will study this in more detail in future studies—The Bittersweet Book, The Prophecy of the Ages, and Christ in His Sanctuary.

THE GREAT ADVENT MOVEMENT
(1844 – PRESENT)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew out of the Great Disappointment of 1844. It never predicted a date when Jesus would return as it wasn't officially organized until 1863. Seventh-day Adventists believe, based on the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, that a special event did occur in heaven on October 22, 1844. They believe that Jesus moved from the holy place to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary to perform the cleansing of the sanctuary—His closing work of judgment. Seventh-day Adventists believe their mission is to proclaim the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 to a dying world, calling the world to worship the Creator. This body of believers keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy and believe in the nearness of the second coming of Jesus. They believe that they are standing on the shoulders of the Protestant Reformers and have been called to complete the Reformation by restoring truths buried by the Dark Ages such as the seventh-day Sabbath. The foundational truth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Christ's ministry in the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary (Daniel 8:14). Revelation 10 depicts the story of the Millerite Movement, the Great Disappointment, and the rise of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

SUMMARY

The four horsemen, which cover the history of the church from the apostolic church to the end of the Dark Ages answers the question as to why there are so many different denominations. God raised up Protestant Reformers who sought to reform the Church of Rome. The people followed the various Protestant Reformers as they systematically restored truths that were buried during the Dark Ages. Sadly, however, when the reformers died, those in the various movements refused to go any further than the reformer did. They stopped progressing and became creed bound, mainly emphasizing the restored doctrinal point of the reformer. Hence, multiple denominations were formed and still exist today.

12. Dear friend, are you willing to accept the Lord's leading throughout Christian history? _____

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