

when He opens the seals of the scroll which He took “out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne” (5:7)! The Lamb’s opening the seven seals is His execution of God’s eternal decree as the exalted Lord. Our Redeemer rules in heaven as Jehovah’s vicegerent governing all of world history from the time of His exaltation onwards.

Thus the period of the seals in Revelation 6, including the four horsemen, is from Christ’s session at God’s right hand to His glorious return in the clouds of heaven. James B. Ramsey makes the same point by arguing from seven as the number of the seals: “the uniform and well-established meaning of the number seven in all symbolical representations, and occurring frequently in this book, being completeness in all covenant matters, renders it certain that this book, being a seven-sealed book, implies that it contains, not a part, but the whole perfect scheme of God’s providence in regard to His church” (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 312). Moreover, as well as being “sealed with seven seals,” the book or scroll is “written within and on the backside” (5:1). In other words, the book is full since it is the complete record of all of history from Christ’s enthronement at His ascension until His bodily return.

Clearly the book and the opening of its seven seals deal with past, present and future, from our perspective in the twenty-first century. It covers that which has been, is and will be. It treats the period between our Lord’s first and second comings.

To state it antithetically, the seals of Revelation 6, including the four horsemen, do not speak exclusively of the past, whether the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 or the Roman Empire, as postmillennialists claim. Nor do the four horsemen and the six seals speak solely of times future to us, say, the literal seven-year tribulation after the rapture and before Christ’s return, as postulated by dispensationalism.

Some claim that the four horsemen in Revelation 6 ride forth *chronologically*, with the white horse (1-2) covering the first couple of centuries or so after Christ’s exaltation, the red horse (3-4) dealing with the period after that and so on. Such a type of interpretation is mechanical and not the idea of biblical prophecy or apocalyptic. It is also speculative and unprovable, leading to many differences in identification. Does anyone really expect the ordinary believer to know the world’s history for the last 2,000 years so as to be able to identify this or that event or person as the specific fulfilment of each of the many sections in Revelation 6-19? We hold the biblical and Reformed principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture as the way of understanding God’s Word!

The truth is that the four horsemen ride forth throughout the New Testament age from Christ’s coronation in heaven to His return with clouds. They occur contemporaneously throughout this period, portraying the main aspects of the history of the gospel era and intensifying as the end approaches!

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Covenant Reformed News

December 2021 • Volume XVIII, Issue 20

Introducing the Four Horsemen of Revelation 6

Horses and horsemen are mentioned some 300 times in the Bible. Zechariah 1 and 6 speak of various coloured horses. John’s vision in Revelation 19 portrays Christ on a white horse followed by His armies of saints upon white horses. But it is the four horsemen of Revelation 6 that are the most famous, and always provoke interest and wonder.

In this series of articles, we will study the identity and meaning of the four horsemen. We shall learn to recognise and listen to their hoof beats. As we see them riding forth, we should pray with all our hearts, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (22:20)!

Right at the beginning, we need to identify the highly significant time period of the four horsemen and the seven seals to which they belong. When does the period of the seals in Revelation 6 *end*?

The sixth seal takes us to the very door of the final judgment (6:12-17). First, awesome events transpire in the creation: there is a great earthquake, and all mountains and islands are moved out of their places; the sun becomes black as sackcloth and the moon as blood; the stars fall to earth and the heavens are rolled up as a scroll (12-14). In His Olivet discourse, Jesus Christ speaks similarly regarding events at His second coming: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:29-30).

Second, the sixth seal speaks of the “great day” of “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16-17), when all of ungodly humanity, including “great men” and “mighty men,” will cry out in terror (15-16). This is another reference to the last day: “The great day of the LORD is near ... the mighty man shall cry there bitterly” (Zeph. 1:14).

Third, Revelation 6:12-17 introduces the last judgment. Chapter 11:15-19 fills out the picture with verse 18 being especially clear: “thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead [i.e., their resurrection], that they should be judged [i.e., at the great assize], and that thou [1] shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and [2] shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.” Revelation 14:17-20 vividly portrays the harvest of the wicked and their being trampled in “the great winepress of the wrath of God” (19). Chapter 20:11-15 presents the final judgment of all human beings before the great white throne of Jesus Christ, with the wicked being “cast into the lake of fire” (15).

When does the period of the seals in Revelation 6 *begin*? With the session of Christ,

Christ's Miracles and Two Natures

The question for this issue of the *News* is, “While on earth did Christ perform miracles by His Deity or because He received the fullness of the Spirit in His human nature or some combination of these two or something else? Could you please explain?”

There can be no doubt that the power to perform miracles is the power of God. As the Son of God, Jesus had that power in Himself and did not need to have that power given Him as others did. Jesus Himself refers to His miracles as proof of His divinity (John 10:37-38) and the fourth gospel concludes with the same testimony: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (20:30-31) Mere men, like the twelve apostles, had to receive the power to perform miracles from God (cf. Matt. 10:1).

Christ's divinity and humanity may not be separated, however, in His miracle-working. As the only begotten Son, He was able to perform and did perform many miracles, but He performed them as the Son of man. He shows us this in His healing the paralysed man who was let down by his friends into the presence of Jesus through the roof (9:1-8). Claiming both the power to forgive sins and to heal, He refers to Himself as the Son of man, that is, the one born in our flesh and like us in all things except sin: “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house” (6). The passage concludes with the thoughts of those who witnessed the miracle (and they were not wrong): “But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men” (8).

But Matthew 9:8 implies that Christ, as man, had to receive the power to perform miracles. As Matthew 28:18 and John 10:18 suggest, Jesus was truly a man in that He had to receive the power He had to lay down His life and to do miracles. How could He at the same time have that power as the eternal Son and also have to receive it? This is the mystery of the incarnation: God came in the flesh!

The preceding raises this question: What about miracles in our day? That is, does God still give power to men to perform miracles as Jesus Himself, according to His human nature received it and as He gave that power to His disciples?

Scripture's answer is “No.” Miracles are “the signs of an apostle” (II Cor. 12:12) and, since there no longer are any apostles, any who were eyewitnesses of Christ's earthly ministry and resurrection, there can be no more miracles performed by men. Nor are they needed, since the Scriptures are completed and the miracles were only ever a witness to God's Word and extraordinary office-bearers (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:4).

Another issue raised by the question we have answered concerns the relationship between the two natures of Christ, His human and divine natures. The church of God, following the teaching of the Word, has always insisted that Christ's two natures are united in one Person and must not be separated. After the incarnation, all that He did

was done by One who was both God and man. It was God come in the flesh who was born in Bethlehem; God and man in one Person who walked the roads of Galilee and performed many mighty works. It was God incarnate who taught the people, called the disciples together, ate and drank with them, and lived among them. It was God manifest in the flesh who was arrested in Gethsemane, was tried and condemned and crucified, and who died for our sins and rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven, and who continues there for our interest until the end of the world.

That is the great “mystery of godliness” (I Tim. 3:16). God cannot suffer and die, and so we say that Christ suffered according to His human nature, but it was only as the eternal Son of God that Christ was able to bear the wrath of God against sin and deliver us from it, doing what no mere man could do. That mystery is evident in His miracles as well. When He stilled the wind and waves of the Sea of Galilee with a word, He did that as the same Person who moments before had been sleeping, exhausted and unheeding of the storm. The same Person who wept at the tomb of Lazarus was able to call life out of death when He raised His friend. This is indeed a great mystery, a mystery which ought to delight the souls of all who believe in Jesus. The mystery of God manifest in the flesh is proof that He is everything we need as Saviour, man to pay for man's sins and God to do what man could never do.

The two natures of Christ may not, therefore, be separated, as the *Creed of Chalcedon* (451) states, “one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” I mention this because I have met people who think that Christ, when He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, left His humanity behind. If that were indeed the case, we would have no part or interest in Him any longer. He is still God manifest in the flesh. As God incarnate, He prays for us in heaven, prepares a place for us, rules over all things on our behalf and readies all things for the day of His return.

Everything He does, therefore, He does as God come in our likeness, and everything He does is miraculous and wonderful. He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. He suffered all His life long but *took* that suffering upon Himself—it did not just happen to Him. He, God and man in one Person, gave Himself to shame and spitting (Isa. 50:6). He controlled all the events leading up to His death, sending Judas out to do his evil work, surrendering Himself to those who came to arrest Him and testifying to Pilate that he, the representative of mighty Rome, had no power but what had been given him by God. He died, not because His life was taken from Him but, because He laid it down (John 10:18) which, for a mere man, would be suicide. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. One stands amazed at every word He spoke and all He did.

And the greatest wonder of all is in these two words: “for me.” The incarnate Son came for my salvation and did so in the everlasting love of God, but also in His love and pity as One who was touched with the feeling of my infirmity. This He did for me, one who is no better or more worthy than others and who, until He rescued me by a miracle of grace, was lost with no hope of being found.

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