

the Christian philosophy of history.

Notice, first, that the history of this age is linear and has an end; it is not cyclical and everlasting, as per paganism and secularism. The history of mankind and this world has a point at which it stops and towards which everything is moving: Christ's return for the day of universal judgment (Rev. 6:16-17), which ushers in the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth.

Second, history includes various factors. It consists not only of the preaching of the gospel or church history (white horse). It is not merely war or military history (red horse). It is not just economic history (black horse) or medical history (pale horse). Human history is the interplay of all four horsemen and the various factors included in them, such as political history and social history. Each individual or family or group or nation acts and reacts with respect to all of these things. The world, the flesh and the devil attack every fallen human being, producing wickedness and misery. Not only sin but grace also works in the hearts and lives of all of God's regenerate people.

Revelation 6 clearly fits with what has happened in the last 2,000 years—all four horsemen have been busy! This chapter of sacred Scripture also presents us with the main elements of our world's future up to Christ's second coming.

Third, history takes place on earth according to heaven's rule. The Greek philosopher Aristotle was terribly wrong in his claim that God is not interested in the world and its history. In his book *Approaching Hoofbeats*, Billy Graham's Arminian theology led him to the ridiculous notion that the four horsemen of Revelation 6 are conditional on man's will! The truth is that it is our Lord Jesus, seated at the right hand of God in glory, who opens the seals and affects Jehovah's eternal decree. History cannot be understood apart from the Triune God of the Bible for it is "His story," written by Him in eternity and realized by Him in time.

Fourth, history is purposeful. Neither human life nor history is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing. History has a goal or purpose: the glory of the blessed Trinity in Jesus Christ through the salvation of His elect church, and His just judgment of the reprobate and impenitent wicked. This truth is only understood and loved by those who believe the inspired Scriptures.

The misinformation in the news presented by the various media outlets consists not only in their presenting factual errors and omitting important stories—typically reflecting their bias—but in their ignoring God's almighty hand. For example, an earthquake is not merely a "natural" event; it is a harbinger of the shaking of the whole world at Christ's return for judgment (Matt. 24:7; Heb. 12:26-27; Rev. 6:12-17)!

All of this gives Christians good reason for being interested in history. History is not "more or less bunk," as Henry Ford claimed. History flows from God's eternal decree as executed by the Lamb of God. Scriptural eschatology gives us a Reformed philosophy of history. These things are vital components of our biblical worldview and crucial for a Christian education. In heaven, our Lord Jesus opens the seven seals of the scroll and sends forth the horses, and by faith we hear their hoofbeats!

*Rev. Stewart*

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## **Lessons From the Four Horsemen**

After considering the four horses of Revelation 6:1-8, both individually and collectively, in the last four issues of the *News*, we are in a position to make several observations.

First, the four horses with their riders are similar to the signs of Christ's return, as set forth, for example, in His Olivet discourse. Compare the white horse with Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." The red horse is akin to Matthew 24's "wars and rumours of wars . . . For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (6-7). The black horse: "famines . . . in divers places" (7). The pale horse: death by "wars and . . . famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (6, 7), and through persecution (9-10, 21, 29). Thus the signs, like the four horsemen, are part of the warp and woof of history, and not something merely added on.

Second, the four horses and the other two seals in Revelation 6, like the signs of our Lord's second coming in Matthew 24, do not support postmillennialism. That is the theory that the vast majority of people in this age will become true believers and that the church will enjoy earthly peace and prosperity, for civil government, industry, art, science, etc., all around the world will be governed by Christians according to biblical principles. Yes, there is the glorious victory of the gospel in saving all of God's chosen people (white horse) but this world will never become a Christian paradise (or anything near it) prior to our Saviour's bodily return. After all, the remaining five seals in Revelation 6 speak of wars, economic disparities, death, martyrdom and anti-Christian injustice, and vast upheavals in creation, respectively.

Third, the six seals in Revelation 6 bring comfort to the child of God. There is the irresistible success of the gospel in calling, sanctifying and preserving each and every one of God's elect and redeemed people out of every kindred, tribe and tongue (seal 1). We are also consoled by the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God over all things, including events which bring awful pain and grievous tears: regional conflicts, poverty, deaths by wild animals, persecution and terrifying upheavals in creation (seals 2-6, respectively). It is not the devil or merciless fate but Jesus Christ who opens the six seals, and He does so as "the Lamb" who died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins (Rev. 6:1). In executing the eternal decree of the Triune God, our Saviour is preparing all things for His second coming and caring for His sheep, for "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

On the basis of the eschatology presented by the four horsemen and, indeed, the other two seals of Revelation 6, we can even say that we have here the key elements in

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## Born of Water and the Spirit

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I will answer the following two related questions in this issue of the *News*:

1) “What does Jesus mean by being ‘born of water and of the Spirit’ in John 3:5? Obviously, this isn’t referring to baptismal regeneration.”

2) “What does John mean by ‘the spirit, and the water, and the blood’ in I John 5:8? If ‘the spirit’ is the Holy Spirit, what are ‘the water’ and ‘the blood’ referring to?”

1) In answering these questions, we will take John 3:5 first. Some interpret the passage to refer to physical birth and spiritual birth, physical birth being “of water” and spiritual birth “of the Spirit.” While it is certainly true that a person must ordinarily first be born physically before he can be born again, that is so obvious and so trite that it is difficult to see why Jesus would even mention it.

Others take the reference to being born of water as a proof of baptismal regeneration, i.e., that we are born again by water baptism. The questioner suggests that such an interpretation is impossible, as indeed it is, for water cannot and does not wash away sin and bring about spiritual rebirth, as so many water baptisms demonstrate. The Bible itself tells us so in I Corinthians 10:1-5, where the water baptism of Israel in the Red Sea did not regenerate many of them. They were “all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea ... But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (2, 5).

Nevertheless, the water in John 3:5 must refer to the water baptism. It cannot refer to anything else. It refers to that water, however, as a sign of the blood of Christ. One must be born of Christ’s blood and Spirit, that is the idea of the passage, but the sign, water, is mentioned instead of that which it represents, the shed blood of Christ.

That the blood of Christ is not named and the sign is named should not seem strange. In both baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the names of the sign and the spiritual realities they signify are often interchanged. Jesus calls the bread of the Lord’s Supper His body, even though it is only the sign, and the water of baptism, though it is not the reality, is commonly called by the name of the reality. We mean that sprinkling or pouring water on someone is not really “baptism” but, because it is so closely associated with real, spiritual baptism by the blood and Spirit of Christ, it has the same name.

Ezekiel says something very similar to John 3:5 in 36:25-27, mixing symbols, pictures and realities: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

The key to the interpretation of John 3:5 is in the passage, in verse 3. Comparing verses 3 and 5, it is evident that being “born of water and of the Spirit” (5) is the same as being “born again” (3). There is only one birth in the passage, though both the blood of Christ (symbolized by, and called by, the name of its sign) and the Spirit of Christ are

involved. There is no other birth and there is no other baptism, but that.

Note that the water of baptism symbolizes both the blood *and* Spirit of Christ, not just the blood. While the word “water” is used in place of the word “blood,” that is the point Jesus is making. It is the Spirit who applies the blood of Christ to us for our cleansing, both the initial washing away of our sins in regeneration and the subsequent washing away of sin in the Spirit’s work of sanctification. But it is the shed blood of Christ which the Spirit applies and which alone avails for my cleansing.

Another important point is that, without this cleansing by the blood and Spirit of Christ, no one will even “see” the kingdom of God (3). We may not trust in anything but the blood and Spirit of Christ. That I was baptized with water does not guarantee my entrance into heaven. That I made a profession of faith does not mean I will see the heavenly kingdom of which Christ speaks in John 3. I must be cleansed of sin and guilt before I can stand in the presence of the God who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab. 1:13) and of whom Psalm 5:4 says, “neither shall evil dwell with thee.”

It is regarding these truths that Jesus chides Nicodemus, “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3:10). What Jesus had said was nothing new but had been spoken long before by the prophet Ezekiel. Not only should Nicodemus have known what Jesus meant by being “born of water and of the Spirit,” but he should have known, too, that works of righteousness, keeping the law and the rites prescribed by the law, do not gain entrance to the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, we should not be too hard on Nicodemus, for even today there are many who do not know these things, though they sit in a church every Lord’s day.

2) That leaves I John 5:8 and the answer is really the same. John mentions water and blood not because they are different things—the blood is symbolized by the water—but because the water is such a beautiful and important picture of the blood as well as of the Spirit. The water, therefore, should never be neglected, though it must always be understood that the water is only a picture and symbol, and that only the blood and Spirit of Christ can open the kingdom to those who were unwashed and unclean, and who needed the spiritual heart transplant that Ezekiel 36:26 describes: a second miraculous birth.

The Spirit, the water and the blood, John says in I John 5:8, “agree in one.” There is but one Lord, one faith and one baptism, the washing away of sin by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, symbolized by the water of baptism.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:7-10). *Rev. Ron Hanko*

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### Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

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