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## The Four Horses Considered Together

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In the last two issues of the *News*, we have identified and explained the four horses of Revelation 6:1-8. The white horse speaks of the gospel, the red horse brings war, the black horse deals with the selling of food and drink, and the pale horse conveys death. One could say that the white horse treats spiritual matters in the ecclesiastical sphere, the red horse concerns military matters in the national sphere, the black horse involves economic matters in the commercial sphere and the pale horse covers biological matters in the mortal sphere.

The four horses give a helpful perspective on the vital issues of man's total depravity and God's sovereign grace. Man's sin issues in war (red horse), huge economic disparities (black horse) and death (pale horse), for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). God's grace comes into this fallen world by the preaching of the gospel (white horse) blessed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ to all His elect. One could sum it all up thus: the first horse deals with the progress of grace in the church and the other three horses with the misery of the curse in the world.

Clearly, the four horses cover key factors or major themes in human history. The movements of the white horse around the globe are traced in books of church history and even factor in studies on world history, though very rarely as prominently as they should. Moreover, is not the history of mankind splattered red with the blood of war, blackened with all sorts of economic woes and famines, and littered with pale corpses?

It is helpful to consider the effect of the four horses upon both those elected in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) and the reprobate or "the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). The pale horse with its rider has authority over both (Rev. 6:8) for all men are mortal since the fall. The black horse affects both believers and unbelievers, for some of both are rich and some are poor and some are in between these two extremes, with I Corinthians 1:26-28 indicating that many of God's people are lightly esteemed and materially poor in this life. Christians too are involved in various ways in wars (red horse), including serving in the military, navy and air force. Bereavement and disabilities bring pain and grief to both the godly and the ungodly. The white horse rides into cities, towns and communities with the result that the elect are saved, whereas the reprobate are hardened and left without excuse. This occasions spiritual separation between those abiding in unbelief and those mercifully given faith.

All this is the sovereign good pleasure of the Most High, and the purpose of the Lamb who takes the book out of God's right hand and opens the seven seals, including the first four: the white, red, black and pale horses!

*Rev. Stewart*

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## Was Nineveh's Repentance Real?

The question for this article of the *News* is: "I have read your article on Jonah and Nineveh in the *Standard Bearer* (15 October, 2021), but can you prove that the people of Nineveh's repentance was sincere and their faith was in Christ who is the only way of salvation? Did Jonah preach Christ? Nothing in the narrative proves this."

Was the repentance of the Ninevites genuine? Was it just "the sorrow of the world," which works death, merely a sorrow for the consequences of their sins and for their threatened destruction? Or was it a "godly sorrow" (II Cor. 7:10)? Many, such as Hugh Martin in his commentary on Jonah, do not believe that it was sincere.

There is clear evidence that Nineveh's repentance was genuine. First, there is the testimony of Jesus in Matthew 12:41 (Luke 11:32): "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." There is no indication in the words of Christ that their repentance was false and every use of the word "repented" in the New Testament is of a real, spiritual repentance, worked by the Spirit of God.

In Matthew 12, Jesus is addressing an "evil and adulterous generation" (39) who refused, in their self-righteousness, to believe and humble themselves. They required a sign from Christ in order to repent and believe. Jesus tells them that no sign would be given but the sign of the prophet Jonah and speaks of Nineveh's repentance as testimony against them. If Nineveh's repentance had not been genuine, then it would have been no testimony against those unbelieving Jews.

Second, the Ninevites humbled themselves before God, cried to God and believed God (Jonah 3:5-9). The latter refers to their believing Jonah's preaching of divine judgment especially but it is also the word that Scripture uses to describe true faith, worked by God's Spirit. They heard *Jonah's* proclamation but they "believed *God*" (5)! Believing God, they prayed to Him and in praying to Him they humbled themselves before Him. There can be no doubt that these Ninevites were saved as a demonstration of the great truth that "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9). God did in Nineveh what He would not do in Israel for their hardness of heart and continued idolatry.

That this repentance lasted for only a short time, that is, for that generation, is evident. Within 100 years, the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah would speak again of Nineveh's evil ways and would prophesy its destruction (Nah. 3:7; Zeph. 2:13). In 612 BC, Nineveh would be destroyed by the Medes.

Nineveh was not saved in its generations. God did not continue His covenant with Nineveh in the Old Testament. That would not happen among the Gentiles until New

Testament times. Nevertheless, God demonstrated the sovereignty of His mercy and foretold the New Testament salvation of the Gentiles in Nineveh's repentance.

The Ninevites, therefore, are an illustration of what the Word says in I John 1:8-9: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." May God grant us all repentance unto life (as He granted it to these Gentiles) and not take away this grace from us (as He took it from Israel)!

Nineveh's salvation also demonstrates the importance of repentance. We cannot be saved from sin, except in the way of repentance and by faith in Christ. Salvation does not leave us in our sins, but saves us both from the guilt and power of sin. Repentance is turning from sin and is part of our conversion to God, and part of our deliverance from the presence and power of sin.

The reader poses a penetrating question, though, in asking whether Christ was preached to the Ninevites. Without the preaching of Christ, there is no possibility of genuine repentance or of faith. The important passage in answering this second question is Luke 11:30: "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation."

Jonah cannot be a type of Christ, nor is he identified as a type in Scripture, but he was a sign, a miracle or sign that pointed ahead to the greater miracle or sign of Christ's coming and work. That is what Christ means when He compares Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish to His own three days in the belly of the earth. The one miracle points ahead to the other and greater miracle.

That miracle of Jonah's deliverance from the fish's belly became part of his preaching in Nineveh, whether he intended it to be so or not. He not only preached to them but he was also a sign to them. It was that sign, as much as Jonah's actual preaching, which God used for the salvation of the Ninevites. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Jonah himself, as much as the Word which came from his mouth, was the sermon he preached in Nineveh. In that way, Jonah's preaching included both the call of the gospel to repentance and the good news of the gospel, the promise that whoever repents and believes will be saved. Thus he preached Christ to them.

We should not be surprised that the gospel was preached in that way in Nineveh. God, in the Old Testament, not only sent His Word through His prophets but very often made them living examples of the Word they brought. Hosea, commanded to marry a whorish woman, was a living sermon to Israel in the days of Jeroboam II, the same king in whose days Jonah prophesied (Hos. 1). Ezekiel, lying on his side in front of an iron pan for some fourteen months, was a sign and sermon to the Jews in the Babylonian captivity in the last days of the Kingdom of Judah (Eze. 4:1-8).

There are those who speculate about Jonah's physical appearance after being in the belly of a fish for three days. This was a miracle and the Word of God does not tell us what it was like in the belly of the fish or anything of Jonah's condition after those three days. It was not his appearance but what happened to Jonah, first under the anger of

Jehovah and then in his repentance, that was a sign to the Ninevites of God's justice of His mercy. How the Ninevites learned his story is beside the point but it was the sign, as well as the threat of destruction, that brought them to their knees.

Perhaps the sign was more effective than an actual recitation of the promises would have been, for the Ninevites would hardly have understood a passage like Isaiah 53, had it been preached to them. Many in Israel, who knew of the promised Messiah, did not understand how He could be "as a root out of a dry ground" or like a lamb led to the slaughter (2, 7).

But the Ninevites would have understood from Jonah's story that the God whom he served, the God of heaven and earth and sea, was different from their idols. They would have understood Jonah's disobedience, and would have learned from his story that the God of Israel was able to punish, and did punish, sin. They would have listened fearfully, therefore, when that man who had suffered such an awful ordeal preached to them the necessity of repentance. They would have realized, too, from Jonah's story that the God of Israel, unlike the gods they served, was a God who is not only just but merciful, a God able and willing to save. They would even have realized that there was in God's sight no difference between Jonah, the Israelite, and themselves.

So Jonah preached in Nineveh by Word and by example. May we, learning from the story of Jonah, have a higher regard for the preaching of the gospel and humbly submit ourselves to it, believing that His Word does not return void (Isa. 55:11). May we never forget that, though it is preached by weak and sinful men, it is "the power of God unto salvation" to all who believe (Rom. 1:16). May we, vomited out of the belly of hell by God's amazing mercy, continue to give attendance on the preaching of the Word so that, when we fall into sin, as Jonah did, we too may be set again on the path of obedience by the power of the Word. And may all glory and praise be to Him, to whom alone belongs the glory both of the means He has appointed and their good fruit (*Canons of Dordt* III/IV:17).

*Rev. Ron Hanko*

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#### *Westminster Confession 15: Of Repentance Unto Life*

1. Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.
2. By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.
3. Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet is it of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.
4. As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation, so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.