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Revelation 19: 11-16 (ESV)

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

I. The King Returns vv. 11-12

Here in Revelation 19:11-19, we encounter a passage so rich in hope and amazement that it is difficult to comment on it, but comment we must. As humans, we love literature, stories, movies, or plays that possess the element of rescue and victory & the triumph of good over evil just when all seems lost. We have here a world decimated by natural and supernatural disasters, ecological, biological, genocidal, demonic, geologic, geographic, political, economic, cosmic, solar, religious, etc. A crisis point has been reached and the day known only to the Father when Jesus was on the earth (MT 24:36) has finally arrived. See **MT 24:32-44**. ①

Prophecies and visions of this specific point in history inundate Scripture. Note a few places: **Zech. 14:1-4; Zeph. 3:8-9,14-15; Malachi 4:5-6; MT 25:31; JN 14:2-3; Acts 17:30-31; I Tim. 6:13-15; II Tim. 4:1; II Thess. 1:6-10; Heb. 10:37-38; Jude 14-15**; etc. plus numerous verses in Revelation of course. It is what God's people long for. Ever since Christ ascended and the angels said to the disciples what is recorded in **Acts 1:10-11**; we have waited eagerly for His return. It is the sign of a true believer that we long for Christ's return (II Tim. 4:8). It was probably these end times prophecies that confused Israel into expecting a Messiah who would kill all their enemies. They were unprepared for a Messiah who would come first as a Savior and whose strongest rebukes were against Israel's religious elite!

In the OT there are verses that prophesy about Jesus' first advent too. From our perspective, it is easy to see why Israel anticipated a Messiah who would bring judgment & victory followed by Kingdom peace, but they mistakenly saw only one advent, and despite plain passages like Isaiah 53 & Psalm 22 that spoke of a suffering Messiah, they anticipated only glorious future peace. We have the good fortune of our place in history to be able to look back and see how the prophecies fit in, but Jewish theologians saw passages like this as referring to the suffering of

Israel herself or a Messiah who wept over their sin, but could not purge those sins. They certainly did not see these scenes of suffering as any sort of substitutionary atonement, and Paul un.masks that mindset in Romans 10:1-4.

This is undoubtedly the most awe-inspiring scene in all of history, and yet John writes only 6 verses to describe it!

The return of Christ, also known as the Parousia, is a very important aspect of the NT, not only in prophetic verses but also anticipated by almost every NT writer. It goes without saying that the OT prophets mentioned it a lot, and we have reviewed many of those passages as we have gone through Revelation, especially looking at the phrase, “the Day of the Lord”.

As Jesus prepares to descend to earth from heaven, on the earth, things could not be worse and the evil, sin and hatred has reached its’ heinous apex. The 7th Bowl has brought the last vestiges of destruction upon the wicked earth dwellers and the capital city of Antichrist has been destroyed. Antichrist & his False Prophet – still alive at this point - have gathered all who will join them to make war against Christ and His army – cf. **Rev. 19:19**.

Whereas the Rapture is an event that has seen believers caught up to meet Christ in the air (I Thess. 4:16-17), and there is no hint that the world sees Christ at that time – they will only be suddenly aware that millions of people have vanished in a split-second. We alone will hear the trumpet blast and the call to, “Come up here!” - the world at large will not. Here is a comparative chart showing some Scripture passages which contrast between the Rapture & the Second Coming: ②

Rapture

1. Christ comes for His own.
(JN 14:3; I Thess. 4:17; II Thess. 2:1)
2. He comes in the air.
(I Thess. 4:17)
3. He claims His bride.
(I Thess. 4:16-17)
4. Removal of believers.
(I Thess. 4:17)
5. Only His own see Him.
(I Thess. 4:13-18)
6. Tribulation begins.
(II Thess. 1:6-9)
7. Saved are delivered from wrath.
(I Thess. 1:10; 5-9)
8. No signs precede the Rapture.
(I Thess. 5:1-3)
9. Focus: Lord & the Church.
(I Thess. 4:13-18)
10. World is deceived.

Return of Christ

1. Christ comes with His own.
(I Thess. 3:13; Jude 14; Rev. 19:14)
2. He comes to the earth.
(Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11)
3. He comes with His bride.
(Rev. 19:6-14)
4. Manifestation of Christ.
(Mal. 4:2)
5. Every eye shall see Him.
(Rev. 1:7)
6. Millennial Kingdom begins.
(Rev. 20:1-7)
7. Unsaved experience God’s wrath.
(Rev. 6:12-17)
8. Signs precede the second coming.
(Luke 21:11,15)
9. Focus: Israel & the Kingdom.
(Matt. 24:14)
10. Satan is bound.

(II Thess. 2:3-12)

(Rev. 20:1-2)

Source^①

In v. 11, when the 1st Seal was broken on the scroll in the hand of Jesus Christ in Rev. 6:1-2, the Tribulation began with a rider on a white horse – a usurper, a false Christ, Antichrist – he brings with him a false peace. The 7 year Tribulation ends with yet another white horse being revealed as heaven is opened. This horse also has a rider, but this rider is vastly different from the rider of the first Seal. He too brings peace, but now it is real peace, but only after well deserved judgment. Only once the wickedness is purged can there ever truly be peace.

This is the revelation of our glorious Lord and Savior – that scene we all long to see – and the crisis point of all history has finally arrived, that scene to which redemptive history has been pointing. Note Matt. 24:27-31, as Jesus prophesies His own glorious return. No longer portrayed in the role of His humiliation and sacrifice, no longer seated on the foal of a donkey, but now seated (symbolically? literally?) on a magnificent white horse.

The symbolism of this scene points to the reality. The white horse means purity and victory, military generalship and might, just as the sword of v. 15, the crowns of v. 12, the winepress of v. 15 are symbolic of victory, God's word, sovereign rule and judgment.

He is called “Faithful and True” (v. 11). None of His promises have ever failed and He remains faithful even to the extent of His literal return to judge and reign on earth. What a remarkable contrast this presents to the Antichrist and the wicked of the earth. John adds, “in righteousness He judges and makes war.” God's holiness demands that He react strongly against sin. He must judge the wicked and this scene has as much to do with final vengeance and judgment as it does with salvation. He came the first time as Savior – to seek the lost – but now He returns as judge (cf. James 5:8; Heb. 9:28; JN 5:22-30). Whereas He was judged by wicked men at His first advent, now He is the judge and executioner of the wicked. ③

He also comes to “wage war”; no longer the suffering servant or humble minister of healing and compassion (cf. Rev. 2:16), but now the One who has patiently waited, longsuffering until this moment in time, chosen by Him, has arrived. History, as the world knows it, comes to an abrupt and final end. Imagine the terror of the wicked as the war that had raged against their ‘invisible’ enemy now becomes face to face and their ultimate, well deserved doom is upon them, and they know it! The 21 judgments (Seal, Trumpet, Bowl) have not softened their hearts, and the gospel has fallen on ears that could not hear, so that all that remains for them is death, judgment and eternal Hell.

John now describes His personal appearance for us, and the first thing he notices is His flaming eyes (cf. Rev. 1:14), denoting eyes set on vengeance, sharply focused and penetrating to the depths of human hearts and motives – cf. Heb. 4:11-13. There are no tears in these eyes as there were as He wept at Lazarus'

grave or over a lost generation who had been led by false shepherds in Jerusalem away from Christ. There is no compassion in them as when He told the disciples to allow the little children to come to Him, nor forgiveness and understanding as He restored Peter in John 21. He is now finally focused on vengeance and righteous judgment.

He is wearing many diadems or crowns (royal crowns) on His head, and again, this is apocalyptic symbolism – He is not trying to balance a stack of real crowns on His head as He leaves heaven. This is expressive of who He is – another way of saying “He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. He alone is sovereign and the world is about to come to grips with that mind blowing and dream shattering (for the wicked) truth. It will be too late for most of course – see **Phil. 2:10-11**.

He has a name written that no one knows but Himself. It is obviously pointless to speculate what this name is – even John couldn’t comprehend it, so it remains to be revealed to us, and maybe it will never be revealed to us.

II. His Clothing v. 13

This final feature of His appearance which John records is the robe He is wearing, which is said to be dipped in blood. This is no picture of redeeming blood. It is not His blood, but the blood of the judgment of slaughtered enemies. Note **Isa. 63:1-6; Rev. 14:18-20 & 19:15**. His robe is full of blood before this battle, because this is the final battle. He has already had victory after victory during the Tribulation years that precede this event, and of course during the course of human history. ④

Alva McLain points out that only Christ fights this final battle. His armies will accompany Him (v. 14 – us) but are not said to carry any weapons, and the robes of His army are white linen, unstained by blood, because vengeance is God’s domain alone. Alva McLean comments, “ *One remarkable feature of the final conflict is that the heavenly “armies” of our Lord bear no weapons and strike no blows. In all that vast assembly, only its regal Leader bears a sword. His vesture alone, not theirs, is stained with blood. Thus, we are told, the opposing armies “were slain by the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of His mouth” (Rev. 19:21). Now this would be utterly strange if the conflict were wholly a spiritual affair, such as that pictured in Ephesians 6:10-17. For in that case the saints would be obligated to put on the whole armor of God and fight against the “rulers of the darkness of this world”. But the situation at the end is totally different: for this is a battle which, though basically between spiritual forces, nevertheless breaks out into the realm of “flesh and blood” so that even the fowls of heaven are filled with it (Rev. 19:21).*”²

When John calls this person, “The Word of God”, it is now absolutely unmistakable that this is the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. JN 1:1; 14:1; I JN 1:1). He is the full expression of God’s person, His will, His purpose and **Hebrews 1:3** lays that out for us; and then **Col. 1:15-20** paints a picture of His absolute control over all He has created.

III. The Armies of Heaven v. 14

The brevity of this verse belies the glorious scene that is represented here. Picture an army of people on white horses, wearing pure white linen – millions of them as far as the eye can see, and not on a hill, but pouring out of heaven! Streams of heavenly light stream forth from behind them because the sky has been opened to reveal heaven, and the glow of their Leader is brighter still as He leads them. John says “armies”, so I believe you have here the army of redeemed saints and the army of the holy angels. This is a scene of joyous, glorious victory for the saved on earth who are still alive waiting for this moment. At the same time this scene is a backdrop of pure terror for the wicked and the fallen angels who now know their time has arrived, and they are about to perish without a Savior. They now realize He is indeed God, and they have fallen for Satan’s lies and an eternal penalty is due. Of course, the demons were already aware of this – cf. **James 2:19** and **Matt. 8:29**; MK 1:24; 5:7; LK 4:33-34. The armies of heaven need no weapons so they do not carry any.

IV. King of Kings and Lord of Lords vv. 15-16

Obviously, this is symbolism. Jesus is not performing a circus trick to see how many crowns He can balance on His head with a sword stuck between His teeth.

We know what the sharp sword symbolizes don’t we? We’ve seen it before in **Heb. 4:12**; and note **Jer. 23:29**; **Eph. 6:17**; **Isa. 49:1-2**. Christ will require only a word to decimate His enemies. There will be no hand to hand combat, no wondering who will win the battle, no Christians falling in battle, no holy angels being shot off their horses and not a hair on the head of any of the redeemed disturbed one whit. ⑤

The word of Christ will kill every person gathered here to battle Him at Armageddon, but it seems they will first stand alive at the judgment of the sheep and goats (**Matt. 25:31-46**). If God simply spoke and the universe came into existence, winning a battle against His rebellious creatures with a word will not present a problem. Notice the demonstration of His word in the account of John in Gethsemane – see **JN 18:6**. All He did was speak the Name of God, “I am”, and these soldiers were helpless before Him. No one took His life, He gave it up. No wicked army can possibly stand in His presence, so His return spells doom for every unbeliever.

His sword will be used to strike down the nations and v. 15 adds that “He will rule them with a rod of iron”. This phrase is referring to what will follow His return and victory over the evil forces on earth. This is a Millennial reference as prophesied in **Ps. 2:1-9** & **Rev. 12:5**. We will look at the Millennial Kingdom in greater detail when we get to Revelation 20, but this expression of Christ ruling with a rod of iron brings in a lot of factors that we’ll consider briefly here;

- A rod of iron will be necessary even though the Millennium will at first be populated only by the redeemed
- There will be laws to follow in the Millennial Kingdom

- There will be a need for punishment when these laws are broken, and of course this implies that they will be broken
- Christ's Kingship in the Millennium is not just spiritual or symbolic. He will rule as King over subjects who will need correction from time to time
- Those passages that speak of rulers and judges in the Kingdom will also mean the administration of laws and punishment at local, regional or national levels
- Ruling with a rod of iron means protection for the obedient – it means justice mixed with mercy.

Furthermore, in v. 15c, “He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty”. He is the judge, having been given that authority by God (cf. JN 5:22). We have seen winepress imagery associated with judgment already in Rev. 14:19-20, and elsewhere and the symbolism of it is violence, & painful, deserved death at God's hand. At this point, only physical death is in view, but later at the Great White Throne Judgment, eternal punishment, the second death, eternal Hell will be the focal point – Rev. 20:11-15. It is always prudent to recall the many warnings about death & judgment, one of the most popular being **Heb. 10:26-31**.

He is further identified by the title or name written on both His robe and His thigh – King of Kings and Lord of Lords!^⑥ This is a title that none could ever hope to transcend. By the time we arrive at this verse, having studied the book of Revelation for a long time, having looked at numerous OT and NT passages and having seen the praise & glory showered on God and the Lamb, this is a fitting title for the One who truly has no rivals and of whom it is said – see **Rom. 11:33-36**.^⑥

“The expectation of Christ's Second Advent is a most important aspect of New Testament eschatology – so much so, in fact, that the faith of the New Testament church is dominated by this expectation. Every book of the New Testament points us to the return of Jesus Christ and urges us to live in such a way as to be always ready for that return... This same lively expectation of Christ's return should mark the church of Jesus Christ today.”^④

Next lesson – Lesson # 63 Rev. 19: 17-21 Defeat of the World's Army at Armageddon

^① Thomas Ice & Tomothy J. Demy eds.); The Return – Understanding Christ's Second Coming & the End Times; Kregel; 1999; pp. 101-102

^② Alva J. McLain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, BMH Books, 1959, reprint 1980; p. 480

^③ See also Ps. 136:3; Deut. 10:17; Dan. 2:47; I Tim. 6:15; Matt. 28:18; Rev. 17:14

^④ Anthony A. Hoekema, as quoted by Robert A. Peterson, in: Salvation Accomplished by the Son, Crossway Books, 2012; p. 251.