

The Defeat of the World's Army at Armageddon Revelation 19:17-21

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Revelation 19: 17-21 (ESV)

¹⁷Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." ¹⁹And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

I. The Supper of the Great God vv. 17-18

Once again, an angel plays a large role as he announces or heralds loudly to proclaim victory before the battle has even started. This angel is "standing in the sun", which probably means "in front of the sun like an angelic eclipse & cries out for the birds to "come and gather together for "the supper of the great God." ①

Notice that the sun, which had been darkened as a result of the 7th Bowl (Rev. 16:10), is now visible again, at least in this vision given to John and the angel takes advantage of that to use it as a backdrop for this announcement which will be surely be heard on earth by those gathered to make war and would have a terrifying effect on them. We recently looked at the marriage of the Lamb and the marriage supper – a supper to which it is an honour to be invited – but now, what a contrast! This is a supper of God no one wants to be invited to. The guests of honour are birds of prey and the main courses are horses and riders.

Geographically, Israel is in a relatively unique position with regard to the migration of European birds. The land acts as a sort of funnel for birds which migrate seasonally through Israel, which is right next to the Mediterranean on one side and hemmed in by mountains on the other. There is such a volume of birds that the Israeli Air Force has had to do studies and come up with ways to keep their jets from being struck by these birds, which destroys the planes and kills the pilots. So getting the birds to Israel + Har-Megiddo will be no problem, whatever birds are left, that is.

J.A. Seiss captures an aspect of this looming battle in his commentary on Revelation that we seldom consider:

“One of the most awful expressions in the word of God, is that which the Psalmist utters with regard to these enraged and deluded kings, and this their expedition, where he says, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” (Ps. 2:4) That laugh of God, who shall fathom it! How shall we even begin to tell its dread significance! From the depths of His eternal being, he so loved the world, as to give His co-eternal and only begotten Son for it. No gift was too precious in His sight, no sacrifice too great, to be made for its redemption. For six thousand years He has been ordering His gracious providence in heaven and earth for its recovery from sin and death. His prophets and His Son have laboured, wept and died, and the ministries of His sublimest servants have been unceasingly employed, to bring it to salvation. But now He laughs!

What failure of love, what exhaustion of grace, what emptying of the sea of His infinite mercies, what decay and withdrawal of all kindly interest and affection must have occurred that there should be this laugh! The whole world moves with one heart, one aim, with all its genius and power concentrated on one end, and with all the potencies of Hell to nerve and help and guide it. Never before was such a combination of forces, natural and supernatural, directed with such skill, or animated with so daring and resolved a spirit. Yet, Jehovah laughs! What an infinitude of majesty and sovereign contempt does He thus express? The rebels are confident. They believe their leader to be invincible. They are sure of the power to handle all nature’s forces. They have no question about being able to cope with mortals or immortals, with men or gods. They despise alike the names and sword of Him who rides the white horse, and all His heavenly cavalry. They deem themselves ready and equal for any emergency of battle even with Him who calls Himself Almighty. But God laughs! Oh, the disappointment and destruction which that laugh portends.”^①

Christ talked about this day in **Matt. 24:27-28**, and there are accounts in the OT of other battles where birds and other animals are seen to eat the flesh of the fallen warriors. Note **Isa. 18:6** (of Cush) & **Jer. 7:32-33** (of the people of Judah after Babylon attacks them. Another OT parallel account is found in **Ezek. 39:17-20**, but as we saw in a previous lesson, this battle is referring to the one that takes place before the Tribulation, not at the end of it.

The destruction of this huge army will leave millions of bodies strewn across the great plain and valley of Har-Megiddo or Armageddon, probably the very scene that **Rev. 14:20** depicts – 200 miles of blood shed in a single day, probably in a single moment as Christ speaks victory and this army is decimated.

This army is the final gathering of the wickedest people left alive on earth. Those killed and who will be eaten by birds (a very ignoble way to be dispatched by the way) are listed as kings, captains, mighty men, all men free and slave, small and great & their horses. The phrase, “horses and their riders” seems redundant here, since it is followed by “the flesh of all men free and slave”. If we assume that these riders are men, why the redundancy?

I wonder here, (and this is my speculation only – I can't prove it) if some of the horses and riders are the horses and riders of Rev. 9:13-18, which we had determined were in fact demonic forces made to appear as horses and riders – evil angels or demons who had morphed from dangerous 'locusts' to a vast 200 million strong army. The reason I wonder this is that there seems to be no record of how the 1/3rd of the angelic host who fell with Satan are ever dealt with in Scripture. They are not mentioned along with the Antichrist & False Prophet who are thrown alive into the Lake of Fire, and they are not mentioned at the Great White Throne Judgment or at Rev. 20:2-3 as Satan is incarcerated in the Abyss for 1,000 years or even when he is released for 1 more final bid to overthrow God in Rev. 20:7-10. Matt. 25:41 says that Hell was prepared for the Devil and his angels, but if many of these horses and riders are not demons, then they remain unaccounted for Scripturally in the final tally of those going to Hell.

The point of v. 18 is that no one who has aligned himself/herself with this rebellious army will escape the final judgment. They will die physically here and then stand before God for judgment and confinement in Hell. This scene is also described in **Zech. 14:1-15**. According to Zechariah, there will be survivors in the nations out of which these rebels have come, and Matt. 25:31-46 also depicts people alive who are unsaved once Christ comes because He judges them as Sheep and Goats – the Sheep enter the Kingdom in mortal bodies and the Goats go to Hell.

II. Battle of the Fools

v. 19

After the announcement for the birds to gather, John now sees the army gathered and they are gathered to make war against Christ (Him who sat on the horse) and His army. This vast earthly army includes the Antichrist, the False Prophet, his kings and their armies from numerous nations. What a display of final, ultimate human depravity as these people actually believe they can overcome God Himself! This is the end of the 7 year Tribulation (3 ½ years of which have been consumed with obvious divine judgments), and this now transcends the prior stupidity of calling on the rocks to fall on them and hide them, but this impressive (by man's standards) gathering is less than the irritation of a buzzing mosquito to Christ who, as we will see, destroys them with a word. Notice **II Thess. 2:7-8**.

III. Annihilation Defined

v. 20

Only 2 verses now describe what we would consider to be the greatest defeat and annihilation of the greatest army ever assembled in history. First, John mentions that the Antichrist and False Prophet are captured – and John is quick to remind us of their evil deeds during the Tribulation, especially that of the False Prophet, the evil religious arm of Antichrist. These 2 do not die alongside the others, but are thrown alive into the Lake of Fire, and it is described as a place that burns with sulfur (brimstone in some translations).

This is the first mention of the Lake of Fire in the Bible. Gehenna (eternal Hell) has been mentioned, as has Hades, but Hades was temporary and will be banished from existence according to Rev. 20:14, but the Lake of Fire is eternal. Apparently, as the Antichrist and False Prophet are thrown into this Lake of Fire, they are transformed into eternal bodies which will not be consumed because by Rev. 20:10, 1,000 years later, when Satan is also thrown into the same place, these 2 are still there and still under torment – living death – they have not been extinguished and their existence ended, but are suffering torment forever. These 2 most evil persons are fittingly the first to inhabit eternal Hell.

The Fallen Angels?

In all of my study on the Book of Revelation, I was surprised by what I felt was a glaring omission with regard to the judgments depicted. It is clear in the gospels that the demonic or fallen angels will be judged and sent to Hell:

- Hell is the place prepared for the devil and his angels – Matt. 25:41
- Satan and his evil angels are judged and defeated at the Cross so they will never triumph in the end – they may win skirmishes, but victory has been won by Christ – JN 16:8-11 (esp. v. 11).
- Matt. 8:29 – the demons know there is a time set forth for them to be incarcerated and judged – cf. James 2:19
- Isaiah 24:21-23 – seems to be indicating the imprisonment of both men and “exalted ones” (NKJV) or the “host of heaven” (NASB) as they await their verdict for eternity
- Some were so evil that they were put into the Abyss soon after creation and have remained there – II Pet. 2:4; Jude 4 – but may be let out temporarily as the Tribulation judgments unfold – cf. Rev. 9ff. ④

There is no question that the demons will end up in eternal Hell – in fact – it was prepared for them to inherit in eternity. However, in all the scenes of people being consigned to eternal Hell in Revelation (19:20; 20:10, 15) – the Antichrist, False Prophet, Satan and all unbelievers, demons are never mentioned, and the commentaries are oddly silent regarding this omission.

So here is my attempt at logically figuring out this dilemma. At the return of Jesus Christ to earth in Rev. 19, the wicked people are judged and physically destroyed (19:20-21). The False Prophet and Antichrist apparently by-pass physical death and are thrown alive into the Lake of Fire (eternal Hell). But these 2 are human. Satan is captured in Rev. 20:1-3, and is sent to the Abyss and locked away for 1,000 years. He is not sent to eternal Hell until Rev. 20:10. People are judged and sent to eternal Hell at the Great White Throne Judgment in Rev. 20: 11-15, but that comes after the Millennium. It is possible that those alive and unsaved at the end of the Tribulation are sent to eternal Hell before the Millennium – cf. MT. 25:41-46 – because that is what the language there seems to be indicating. They do not make it to the Great White Throne.

So what are we left with? At the start of the Millennium, we have unglorified believers, live humans who have not yet experienced physical death entering the Millennial Kingdom – cf. MT 25:31-40. There will also be glorified saints of all ages – both raptured, dead but resurrected – alive & actively participating in the Millennial Kingdom. All are accounted for. We also have the unglorified offspring of the unglorified earth dwellers who are born during the 1,000 years (some of whom will be saved, and some who will be part of the final rebellion at the end of the 1,000 years) – cf. Rev. 20:8-9.

For 1,000 years, Satan has no ability to influence anything within humanity, until he is released “after” the 1,000 years (cf. Rev. 20:7) and then he succeeds in deceiving some people – lots of people according to v. 8 – “whose number is as the sand of the sea”! This will be no local skirmish. So the fact of this massive rebellion after the 1,000 years has to be accounted for, and I see only 3 main options:

1.) The demons remain on earth as Satan is incarcerated in the Abyss and are able to influence people during the Millennium so that, when Satan is released, he has a ready-made demonic and human standing army on alert to make one final attempt to dethrone Jesus Christ.
2.) The demons are incarcerated with Satan in the Abyss for 1,000 years and come out with him to help him deceive the nations one last time after 1,000 years of planning.
3.) The demons are sent to Hell along with the Antichrist & False Prophet in Rev. 19:20, but that is not mentioned in the text, and Satan is alone when he is released and must deceive the nations on his own even though he is neither omnipotent, omniscient nor omnipresent. ⑤

Those are the only three viable options as I see them. My preference is that # 2 is the most likely scenario. First of all, I reject # 1 because the Millennium is described in the Bible as idyllic, Eden-like life in peace, prosperity, goodness and health, all under the Jerusalem centered rule of Jesus Christ Himself. I have already mentioned in an earlier lesson that the Millennial Kingdom seems to be one last demonstration in history by God to show that man is totally depraved. Even under worldwide Edenic conditions, with Christ visible among His people & accessible, man’s internal, sinful nature breeds rebellion rather than worship directed to the true God, unless He intervenes. It would not serve God’s purpose to allow demonic influence when He has specifically waylaid Satan, so that man could use the excuse, “the demons made me do it.”

Secondly, when Satan is released, we must remember that i.) he is not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent, but he is a created being and can only be at one place at one time. He will need help to gather this army and having the assistance of demons who have been locked up with him for 1,000 years would be the perfect way to plan and accomplish this. ii.) This occurs after the 1,000 years are ended, and we are not told how long after, so this going out and gathering an army of the size described in the text does not take place during the Millennium (which it could if the demons were there during it), but after it has expired. iii.) One thousand years is a long time to plan a rebellion and Satan by himself is merely a

schemer and no plan could be passed along to demons if they are not there with him. If he is separated from the earthly goings on, and the demons are on earth, he is separated from them too.

I also reject the 3rd view – that the demons are already in Hell as of Rev. 19:20, for the same reasons as given above regarding # 1.

So, when Satan is captured in Rev. 20:1-3, I believe it is implied by logical analysis that his demonic hordes, those who originally fell with him in the beginning, are also captured and incarcerated with him in the Abyss for 1,000 years. Some of these could be part of the number of fallen angels who were sent to the Abyss in chains (cf. II Pet. 2:4) and were released temporarily at Rev. 9:1 ff to be part of the Tribulation judgments. They remain there with Satan (Isa. 24:21-23) until they are released and enjoy a short-lived rebellion alongside a human army of rebels, but are then all thrown into Hell with Satan at Rev. 20:10. This is implied because in Scripture, the demons seem always to be tied to Satan, and do not act as independent operators – cf. Rev. 12:7-12 – notice how the demons are mentioned in Rev. 12:7-9, but from vv. 10-12, Satan alone is mentioned but his demonic forces are implied. Just as Adam is considered the federal head of humanity, Satan is the head of the demons.

IV. Sudden Defeat & Bitter Death v. 21

The rest (v. 21) are slain by the sword that proceeds out of Christ's mouth, and as we have seen, this is symbolic of God's word. John Phillips describes this very well in his commentary;

“Then suddenly it will all be over. In fact, there will be no war at all, in the sense that we think of war. There will be just one word spoken from Him who sits astride the great white horse. Once He spoke a word to a fig tree, and it withered away. Once He spoke to the howling winds and heaving waves, and the storm clouds vanished and the waves fell still. Once He spoke to a legion of demons bursting at the seams of a poor man's soul, and instantly they fled. Now, he speaks a word and the war is over. The blasphemous, loud-mouthed beast is stricken where he stands. The false prophet, the miracle working windbag from the pit is punctured and still. The pair of them are bundled up and hurled headlong into the everlasting flames. Another word, and the panic-stricken armies reel and stagger and fall down dead. Field marshals and generals, admirals and air commanders, soldiers and sailors, rank and file, one and all – they fall. And the vultures descend and cover the scene.”^②

With this scene, history as we know it comes to an abrupt end. Christ is about to restore the world to the Edenic paradise it was created to be as He returns to earth – cf. **Zech. 14:4** - to set up His Millennial Kingdom and to reign from David's throne which is His rightful place of authority, from Jerusalem.

Next lesson – Lesson # 64 Rev. 20: 1-10 Overview of the Millennial Kingdom

^① J.A. Seiss (1823-1904 / Brethren), The Apocalypse; Zondervan, not dated, pp. 440-441

^② John Phillips, Exploring Revelation; Moody Press; 1974; p. 249