

Revelation

Part Forty-Nine
The Armies in Heaven
(*Revelation 19:11-21*)

With Study Questions

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(Revelation 19:11-21)

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³ He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God ¹⁴ And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵ Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS ¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, ¹⁸ that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great." ¹⁹ And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. ²⁰ Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. ²¹ And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh (Revelation 19:11-21).

Introduction

A far less difficult and controversial book written by the Apostle John is First John. That brief book contains a theme of sound doctrine (warning against antichrists) obedience (keeping His commandments) and love (that

we should love one another). Sprinkled throughout those wonderful admonitions is something we read of with regularity in the Revelation (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17; 2:26; 3:5, etc.); that of being an overcomer-*nikao*.

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4, 5)?

So certain is this victory that John writes as if it is complete. Yet clearly, we are in the midst of battle. Calvin explains it.

This passage is remarkable: for though Satan continually repeats his dreadful and horrible onsets, yet the Spirit of God, declaring that we are beyond the reach of danger, removes fear, and animates us to fight with courage.¹

If one does not “**believe[s] that Jesus is the Son of God**” this battle is lost before it begins. But the believer is announced to be an overcomer and, no doubt, for the Christian this battle begins with the overcoming of the corruption of our own nature, its lusts and the crafts of Satan, in short, whatever leads us away from God.²

The question before us in a passage like Revelation 19:11-21 is, broadly speaking, what is the product of this overcoming of which John writes? What does it accomplish? How big is it? Of what does it consist? What is the mechanism behind it and what is our role in it?

Perhaps I can ask it a different way: For what purpose has God saved us? Is it merely my individual piety and welfare or do I have a task? What are my marching orders? What is God doing in history and at what level am I commissioned to participate? After all, Christ is not the only one in this passage on a white horse!

God’s Plan for History

¹ Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). [Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles](#) (p. 254). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

² Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). [Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles](#) (p. 255). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

It is here that disagreements regarding what God is doing in history reach a fever pitch.

On one end of the spectrum there are those who consign this entire chapter to the final day of history. The victorious status of the One on the white horse (of which the Scriptures speak a great deal. Psalm 22:27; 67; 72:8, 19; 138:4; Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14, etc., all speak of worldwide blessing through Christ) is relegated to events which will happen after the Second Coming.

According to this view, chapter nineteen is Judgment Day and chapter twenty (the reign of Christ) happens after (a future millennium of Christ reigning in person). Until then, we should expect the Christian faith to be, at least in some respects, a dismal failure. You may think I am overstating the issue.

The *Failure of Christianity* is perhaps a shocking concept, but it is the title of a chart on page 77½ of Clarence Larkin's longstanding and famous book on dispensationalism. The book first published in 1918 is still in print! Larkin writes,

It is evident that there are more than a 100 times as many persons born into the world each year, as there are persons 'New Born', and that thus far Christianity, as a world converting power, is a failure, all of which proves that, if after 1900 years of gospel preaching the world is not converted, it is not God's purpose to convert the world by the preaching of the gospel in this age, but simply to gather out an 'elect body' – the church. The 'Millennial Age' will be the 'Dispensation of the Spirit,' then righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the deep."³

Notwithstanding the dubious statistics (100 times as many born as 'New Born') and logic (all of which proves...) of this paragraph, the conclusion[s] have been devastating for the church. "...it is not God's purpose to convert the world by the preaching of the gospel" prior to the Second Coming!!

This, at face value, appears to collide with the words of Christ Himself:

³ Clarence Larkin *Dispensational Truth* (Rev. Clarence Larkin Est. 2802 N. Park Ave., Philadelphia 32, Pa. U. S. A., 1918), p. 77 1/2

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17).

Most of you have not likely heard of Clarence Larkin, so you may be thinking (as I probably would, hearing such things) that I have picked some obscure theological figure to build an eschatological strawman. But consider the words of the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, perhaps the most influential seminary in America today. Lewis Sperry Chafer states,

Another error to be avoided in connection with this subject is the supposition that the divine purpose in this age is the conversion of the world. It is true that the world will be converted and there is yet to be a kingdom of righteousness in the earth; but according to the Bible, that day of a transformed earth, so far from being the result of Christian service, is said to follow rather than precede the return of Christ, and is said to be made possible only by His personal presence and immediate power.⁴

I don't think I am overstating the issue to conclude that according to these very popular, yet very modern views, the Gospel is insufficient to produce all that the Scriptures teach will be accomplished by Christ. He must come again and finish work left undone. This appears in conflict with Hebrews.

...so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).

Contrast this with the view of the renowned Princeton seminarian, Benjamin B. Warfield. I mention Warfield, not to canonize him, but that we might all know the position of great thinkers during, arguably, richer theological times. Also, that you might be aware that this very optimistic

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, (Dunham Publishing Company, 1926), p. 212.

eschatology is not novel, but has deep biblical, historical roots.⁵ Warfield on Revelation nineteen writes,

The section opens with a vision of the victory of the Word of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all His enemies. We see Him come forth from heaven girt for war, followed by the armies of heaven; the birds of the air are summoned to the feast of corpses that shall be prepared for them: the armies of the enemy - the beasts and the kings of the earth - are gathered against Him and are totally destroyed; and "all the birds are filled with their flesh" (xix. 11-21). It is a vivid picture of a complete victory, an entire conquest, that we have here; and all the imagery of war and battle is employed to give it life. This is the symbol. The thing symbolized is obviously the complete victory of the Son of God over all the hosts of wickedness. Only a single hint of this signification is afforded by the language of the description, but that is enough. On two occasions we are carefully told that the sword by which the victory is won proceeds *out of the mouth* of the conqueror (verses 15 and 21). We are not to think, as we read, of any literal war or manual fighting, therefore; the conquest is wrought by the spoken word - in short, by the preaching of the Gospel. In fine, we have before us here a picture of the victorious career of the Gospel of Christ in the world. All the imagery of the dread battle and its hideous details are but to give us the impression of the completeness of the victory. Christ's Gospel is to conquer the earth: He is to overcome all His enemies. There is, of course, nothing new in this. The victory of the Gospel was predicted over and over again even in Old Testament times under the figure of a spiritual conquest...What we have here, in effect, is a picture of the whole period between the first and second advents, seen from the point of view of heaven. It is the period of the advancing victory of the Son of God over the world, emphasizing, in

⁵ The late Dr. Greg Bahnsen mentioned that this quotation from Warfield is what led him away from amillennialism to postmillennialism.

harmony with its place at the end of the book, the completeness of the victory. It is the eleventh chapter of Romans and the fifteenth of I Corinthians in symbolical form: and there is nothing in it that was not already in them - except that, perhaps, the completeness of the triumph of the Gospel is possibly somewhat more emphasized here.⁶

Chilton also says it well.

...and He will reign forever and ever. We must not concede to the enemy even one square inch of ground in heaven or on earth. Christ and His army are riding forth, conquering and to conquer.⁷

As does Abraham Kuyper.

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!

The very popular practice among our brothers and sisters in Christ to offer a wincing praise to God when we see evil triumph because it marks that the end is near has become an unhealthy obsession. We should rather find ourselves animated to fight with courage.

A Survey of Revelation 19:11-21

Again, let us succinctly cover the passage. Our Savior's great promise to be with us always (Matthew 28:20 is dramatically presented with the opening of heaven and His riding forth on a "**white horse**" which is symbolic of a victory already won!

He is described in a similar manner to that which we saw in the first chapter. Let us be reminded, that of all the beasts and monsters John beheld in this entire book, only one made him fall "**as though dead**"

⁶ https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield_millennium.html#fn07

⁷ David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 492.

(Revelation 1:17), and that being the vision of a glorified Christ. O, that we might have an elevated grasp of His glory!

The only blood mentioned in the chapter (other than the avenged blood of His servants) is the blood upon the robe of Christ. We are to ever be reminded that the great victory is a victory purchased/ransomed by the death and resurrection of Christ, which we know by **“the Word of God.”** It is for this reason that the prime directive for every true church is *word and sacrament*.

It may seem odd that the **“armies of heaven”** are Christians until we recall that from a heavenly perspective that is precisely where we are. We are **“seated with Him in the heavenly places”** (Ephesians 2:6). We, even now, have come to **“assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven”** (Hebrews 12:22, 23). Out of the **“mouth”** of Christ we see a **“sword”** which brings both the message of redemption and is that by which He **“rule[s]”** the nations (Psalm 2:8, 9). It is a two-pronged battle where the Lord deposes evil and advances the Truth.

The curse of the covenant includes being eaten by **“birds”** (Deuteronomy 28:26, 49; Matthew 24:28). It is the utter vanquishing of evil; some even consider it a cleansing. There is a vicious hostility between those who rule on the earth, viewing themselves as the ultimate oracles of the hope of man and the King of kings who rules as One who, through His own blood has purchased the souls of men and ever guides them in true wisdom and holiness.

In the current context the **“beast”** and the **“false prophet”** are likely Nero and the Emperor Cult. But this continues as the Great Commission marches through history. But this Great Commission applies to all, throughout the course of history, who engage in similar battles.

Finally, those who are **“killed with the sword”** in verse twenty-one are those who have lost their lives by finding their lives (Matthew 16:25). These enemies of Christ are defeated by God’s grace, subduing their hearts through the message preached.

Conclusion

In conclusion, how does a chapter like this speak to us? Perhaps I can answer with an anecdote. To this day I coach. The owner of the club I coach for is very concerned with the development of the players within his club.

He is convinced that the venue for the development of those players occurs, first and foremost, with them in the game. He has created a rule for the club where that is required. It is in the playing of the game that our weaknesses are exposed.

Sound doctrine, obedience, love are merely ethereal concepts apart from our practice of them. I found seminary engaging and intriguing because I was already a pastor and found immediate use for what I was being trained in. If you desire to grow in personal piety, you may need to engage. Sometimes you have to put your toe in the water if you want to see a changing in the tide (Joshua 3:13).

Where do we fight? Everywhere. First within our own hearts, then every place our feet touch. As those in "fine linen, white and clean" and on "**white horses**" following Christ, we are to ever proclaim that there is only One on a white horse wearing "**a robe dipped in blood.**" This is what Paul says we proclaim, when we go to the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Questions for Study

1. What are some of the major themes in 1 John? Why do you think John emphasizes being an overcomer (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the various views on God's eschatological trajectory for history. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the view that the conversion of the world is not God's plan in the current dispensation (pages 3-5).
3. Read and discuss Warfield's take on Revelation nineteen. As you contrast this with the more popular current view, what difference does this make in terms of the Christian life (pages 6, 7)?
4. Review the survey of Revelation 19:11-21. What is taking place here (pages 7, 8)?
5. How does all of this speak to our Christian life (pages 8, 9)?