

Where Is The Premillennial Resurrection and Rapture To Be Found?

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 19:11-14

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Why is it necessary or even profitable to preach from such a controversial passage as Revelation 19, which is admittedly full of figurative language and symbols?

The first reason is because it is God's Word, and "**all scripture is given by inspiration of the God**, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The second reason it is necessary and profitable to preach from Revelation 19 is because a blessing is promised by the Lord to those who read, hear, and obey the inspired words found in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:3). This offered blessing presupposes that there are very important matters presented in the Book of Revelation for us to understand and to apply to our lives.

The third reason it is necessary and profitable to preach from such a highly symbolic and controversial portion of Scripture as Revelation 19 is because we desire to see the Church of Christ visibly united and not divided into thousands of pieces as it presently is. For it is the revealed will of God that all such divisions and schisms in Christ's Visible Church be removed (according to 1 Corinthians 1:10). This is accomplished not by ignoring what divides Christians, but by prayerfully and diligently working together by God's Word and Spirit through those differences (using the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the Holy Scripture, to come to agreement). Dear ones, it is important to speak as clearly as possible to those controversies that divide the Church, with hope in Christ that He will reform and bring His Church to a covenanted uniformity in doctrine, worship, and government of the church (as He has promised to do in Isaiah 2:1-4).

The fourth reason why it is necessary and profitable to work our way through Revelation 19 as we seek to understand how Christ is "King of kings and Lord of lords" is because we need to know, and we need to daily cast ourselves upon Christ (as our King of kings and Lord of lords in all of the trials, tribulations, afflictions, and temptations that we face). A passage of Scripture like Revelation 19 will give greater sight to our faith to behold Jesus Christ who has legally conquered all of His and our enemies by His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, and Revelation 19 does exactly that by taking us to a period of time in which Jesus Christ will defeat two great enemies of His Church (as we shall see).

And the fifth reason why this is not wasted time, but rather highly useful and profitable time spent in considering Revelation 19 is because we need to know and to understand who these enemies of Christ and His faithful Church are (who would seek to destroy Christ's faithful witnesses), so that we might be warned about them, testify against them, and warn others to avoid all association with these enemies. These two enemies are identified in Revelation 19:20 as the beast and the false prophet. But how can Christ's faithful witnesses be warned about these two enemies, testify against these two enemies, or warn others about these two enemies, if the Church of Christ doesn't even agree as to who these two enemies are?

For example, **futurists** (within the Premillennial camp) will see no immediate danger from the false prophet because they allege he is a single individual that has not yet been clearly identified in history, but he will be so identified sometime in the future. Whereas **preterists** will likewise see no immediate danger from the false prophet because they allege the false prophet to have already appeared and to have been destroyed by Christ in the first century when Jerusalem and her temple were destroyed by the Romans in 70 a.d. But we who are **historicists** (within the Postmillennial camp) believe there is a very immediate danger from the false prophet, because that false prophet has been warring against Christ and His faithful witnesses for centuries, and is identified as the papal Church of Rome. This I submit is not only the position which agrees with Scripture (which we will consider in a future sermon), but the position that was promoted by our Protestant reformers and included in their Confessions, Creeds, and Covenants as well.

So you see, dear ones, there are serious consequences that follow from one's interpretation of who these enemies are, whom Christ will destroy in Revelation 19:20. It is of great consequence to the Christian whether the false prophet is entirely past, entirely future, or whether the false prophet is a present enemy that is prophesied in Scripture to lead many away from Christ and from His faithful witnesses into the apostasy of the antichrist (which is the papacy). An enemy that has already been destroyed is not an immediate concern. Likewise an enemy that has not yet appeared is not an immediate concern. However, an enemy that is presently warring against Christ and His faithful witnesses and seeking to lead people into destruction is an enemy that is an immediate concern.

Thus, dear ones, I want you to understand that as we work our way through this prophecy in Revelation 19, we are not addressing speculative theories, but are rather addressing historical events that have occurred, are occurring, and will occur. These matters are highly relevant to us as Christians in knowing who Christ's enemies are, and how these enemies of Christ will be overcome by Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This detour from our study in the Book of Ezra you'll recall occurred at that point in our text when King Artaxerxes of Persia, who reigned over much of the world at that time, declared himself to be "king of kings" (in Ezra 7:12). This is a title that is ultimately fulfilled in an absolute sense in Christ, our Mediator, who is declared by the Holy Spirit to be "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16).

In the previous sermon, you will recall that we began our study of Revelation 19 by seeking to remove erroneous interpretations from this chapter in the Bible, so that we might then proceed to a biblical understanding and interpretation of Christ's victory over His enemies. When we ended the previous sermon, we were exposing the error of premillennialism, which interprets Christ's coming upon a white horse here in Revelation 19 to be Christ's visible, bodily Second Coming before the millennium begins (in Revelation 20).

We first observed (in the previous sermon) that Revelation 19 is filled with much figurative language and symbolism, which is so often used in other portions of Scripture when referring to Christ coming invisibly and non-bodily in judgment upon nations and upon the backsliding church. Whereas we noted that when Christ's visible, bodily Second Coming is in view in prophetic Scripture, all highly figurative language and symbolism is omitted. Thus, all of the figurative language and prophetic symbols used of Christ in coming upon a white horse to judge His enemies is much more likely to refer to an invisible, non-bodily coming of Christ in judgment upon His enemies, using the Church of Christ in preaching the Gospel and using the converted nations of the world to bring judgment upon the beast and upon the false prophet.

In the second place, we observed (in the previous sermon) that the coming of Christ upon a white horse in Revelation 19 omits any reference to a premillennial resurrection or rapture, which also leads us to conclude that this coming of Christ in Revelation 19 is not Christ's visible, bodily Second Coming. But as we continue today to expose the errors of premillennialism, let us respond to a couple objections that may be raised by Premils who understand this coming of Christ in Revelation 19 to be His visible, bodily Second Coming.

I. The First Objection—The Premillennial Resurrection and Rapture Are Implied in Revelation 19.

A. The Premil will agree with us that there is no **explicit** reference to a premillennial resurrection or rapture in Revelation 19, but he may direct our attention to verse 14, where reference is made to "the armies which were in heaven" following Christ "upon white horses". These armies of heaven that ride upon white horses are sometimes alleged by Premils to be Christians who have just been previously resurrected from the dead and raptured (though no mention of this occurs in Revelation 19). The Premil turns to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and notes that the resurrection of dead Christians and the rapture of living Christians will occur simultaneous with the visible, bodily Second Coming of Christ. Thus, the armies out of heaven that follow Christ upon white horses in Revelation 19 are alleged to be resurrected and raptured Christians.

B. My Response.

1. I submit that these "armies which were in heaven" are far more likely to be a reference to heavenly angels which accompany Christ in defeating Christ's enemies, rather than resurrected or raptured Christians (2 Kings 6:17; Psalm 68:1,17-18,21; Habakkuk 3:8; Matthew 26:53). Angels are said in various passages of Scripture to be clothed in white garments (Matthew 28:3; Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Revelation 15:6).

2. Premils believe that the coming of Christ in Revelation 19 is the same visible, bodily Second Coming as that in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and I agree with Premils that 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is the visible, bodily Second Coming of Christ, but I disagree with Premils that Revelation 19 is the visible, bodily Second Coming of Christ. For let it be noted that according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 it is Christ that descends from heaven (the abode of God), and that the raptured or translated Christians are caught up from earth to be with the Lord "in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (not to meet the Lord in heaven from which the Lord descends and from which the armies that follow Christ likewise descend according Revelation 19). I submit, therefore, that Christ's coming in Revelation 19 is not the same event as Christ's visible, bodily Second Coming that is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

3. Just as Christ figuratively riding upon a white horse is indicative of an invisible, non-bodily coming of Christ (as we saw in the previous sermon, when we compared the figurative language in Revelation 19 with the very similar figurative language found in Isaiah 63:1-2; Habakkuk 3:3-12,15; and Micah 1:3-5), so likewise these armies are riding upon figurative white horses as well, and thus do not speak of these armies following Christ at His visible, bodily Second Coming (but rather following Christ at an invisible, non-bodily coming to judge His enemies before the millennium).

II. A Second Objection—The Premillennial Resurrection and Rapture Are Explicitly Stated in Revelation 20.

A. Even if the Premil is not successful in demonstrating a premillennial resurrection of Christians in Revelation 19 (when it speaks of armies that were in heaven following Christ), he is confident that a premillennial bodily resurrection of Christians is found in Revelation 20:4-5.

B. My Response.

1. I submit that the resurrection that is mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5 does not occur at the same time as the coming of Christ that is mentioned in Revelation 19. All that is mentioned in Revelation 19 is that Christ comes as the conquering King of kings and Lord of lords, but without any reference to the bodily resurrection of believers (as we noted earlier in this sermon). By the time we get to the resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5, what events have already occurred?

a. First, Christ and His armies from heaven have come and have destroyed their enemies as we see in Revelation 19.

b. Second, Satan is taken and bound for a figurative thousand years so that he can no longer deceive the nations (Revelation 20:1-3) until the thousand years are finished (Revelation 20:7-10).

c. Third, after these preceding events are completed, there is a resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5.

2. It ought to be clear that this resurrection (in Revelation 20:4-5) is not simultaneous with the coming of the Lord upon a white horse (in Revelation 19), which it must be if premillennialism is taught in Revelation 19 and Revelation 20. Dear ones, this is a most important observation in considering what is taught in Revelation 19 and Revelation 20. These prophetic events are consecutive events, not simultaneous events (as indicated by the progression noted in the phrase, "And I saw" in Revelation 19:11,17,19; Revelation 20:1,4,11,12). Thus, the Holy Spirit makes clear by the very same terms used ("And I saw") that we are seeing consecutive prophetic events that follow one another, rather than simultaneous events that occur at precisely the same time. This demonstrates the Premil position to be in error, for 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 teaches ever so clearly that the resurrection occurs precisely at the same time as Christ's visible, bodily Second Coming; whereas Revelation 20 teaches a resurrection after Christ's coming, after the defeat of Christ's enemies, and after the binding of Satan for a figurative thousand years. I'll have more to say about Revelation 20:4-5 in a future sermon, and so I will avoid a more full explanation of Revelation 20:4-5 at this time.

3. Thus, the contention of premillennialism that the resurrection in Revelation 20:4-5 is a bodily resurrection before the millennium is shown to be false, because the resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5 does not occur simultaneous with the coming of Christ in Revelation 19 (as Scripture would demand according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Dear ones, in conclusion, I want to make some application to your life at this time. Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, and He will destroy all of His enemies. Are you merely pretending obedience to Christ as King? Are you merely going through the motions of outward worship and obedience, while your heart is far away from love for Christ? Dear ones, this Christ who rides upon a white horse has eyes that "were as a flame of fire" (according to Revelation 19:12). His eyes burn into the very depths of your heart and mine to see whether we are hypocrites playing games with Him or whether we are lovers of Christ who trust Him and are willing to take up our cross and follow Him in loving and thankful obedience to His commandments. Dear ones, you may be able to fool those around you, but you cannot fool Christ. And there will be everlasting judgment in hell to pay for your mere pretended obedience to Christ.

But to all those who receive by faith alone the perfect righteousness of Christ alone as their only ground and hope of justification before a holy God, there is the promise to you that Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords will even destroy that last enemy, death, when He comes at His visible, bodily Second Coming. The world has every reason to fear death, because death will only usher them into everlasting hell. However, those who have turned away from trusting in themselves or in anything that they can do to save them, and have turned

instead to trust in Christ alone for their eternal salvation, death and the fear of death is legally destroyed as an enemy—for Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords has legally conquered death and the fear of death for the Christian. For now death becomes the door that ushers the child of God into the very presence of everlasting joy with Christ in heaven. And the Christian is assured (based upon the promise of God who cannot lie) that this mortal body that is dying and will die, will also be raised gloriously at Christ's Second Coming never to die again (Revelation 21:4-7). And that is why, dear ones, we are to love the visible and bodily Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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