

Christ Advancing His Judgments

Revelation 19:17-21

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-06-17

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Text

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven, "Come, gather together to the great dinner of God, 18 so that you may eat flesh of kings and flesh of commanders and flesh of the mighty and flesh of horses along with their riders, even the flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great." 19 And I saw the Beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the One riding the horse and against His army. 20 So the Beast was captured, and with him the False prophet, the one who performed signs in his presence (by which he had deceived those who had received the mark of the Beast and those who worshiped his image). The two were thrown alive into the Lake of Fire that burns with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed by the sword that proceeds from the mouth of the One riding the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Introduction

Last week we saw that Christ and His armies rode forth out of heaven in AD 70 to begin the conquest of nations. And Daniel 7 explicitly ties this kingdom advance with the time immediately after the first three and a half years of the war. And everything about the symbolism in verses 11-16 showed that it would be a successful and victorious conquest. We saw that all nations are guaranteed to eventually be sheep who would be shepherded by Jesus. Would it be gradual? Yes. But it will be victorious.

But in this second snapshot of what Jesus began in AD 70, we see the flip side of the coin - those who refuse to kiss the Son and submit to His reign will perish in His wrath. And this passage shows that the wrath of Christ is a very scary thing. Granted, this is primarily looking at the mopping up operations in Israel and Rome in AD 70, but it is worded in such a way that it sets forth a general principle applicable to all nations. The only options for nations today are to give unconditional surrender to Jesus or to perish under similar judgments.

I. The dead from the first half of the war (vv. 17-18)

And the first thing that we see in this passage is that the war from AD 66-70 was devastating, with millions dying. Many commentaries have expressed puzzlement that corpses are mentioned in verses 17-18 before the battle of verses 19-21 even begins. But there is nothing to be puzzled about. If you strictly follow the sequence of these chapters, these corpses are from the war leading up to the burning of Jerusalem in AD 70, and now that the Beast has

taken care of the troublesome rebels in Israel, he is determined to war against Christ and against Christians. We saw before that this had been his intention right from the start, but the factions in Jerusalem had diverted him from persecuting the saints. And God preserved the 144,000 during that three and a half year war in Pella. So for the partial preterist, there is a perfect fulfillment and a perfect order in these verses. The dead bodies are littered around the ground in August of AD 70.

A. *The timing*

And that this was AD 70, and not sometime far off into the distant future can be seen from a number of angles.

The context all happened in AD 70 (18:1-19:10)

I'll skip over the first point because we have been teaching on these timing factors all through chapters 17-19, and they point us to the fulfillment of verses 1-21 in August of AD 70. That's when Christ's armies ride forth in this display. In fact, I believe they rode forth on August 1, to be precise.

The beast and false prophet are still on the scene (vv. 19-20)

But the immediate context shows this too: For example, verses 19-20 make clear that the beast and the false prophet are still on the scene. They stand with their gathered armies to now fight against Christ and Christians now that Jerusalem has fallen. So this implies that the leaders who were controlled by these two demons are around as well. They are still leading the persecutors. Well, if that is the case, it has to be during a time when Titus is still in Israel and when Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakkai is functioning as spiritual leader to the new Israel of rabbinic Judaism. That would be a pretty narrow window of time.

It is a time when people ride horses into battle, not tanks and helicopters (v. 18)

But verse 18 also shows why those who place this section as taking place in our imminent future are forced to not be literal here. Dispensationalists pride themselves in being literal, but we have seen throughout this book that I am much more literal than they are. Anyway, verse 18 speaks of the "flesh of horses along with their riders." This is not a time of technologically advanced warfare. This was a time when people still used horses in battle. It kind of negates the tanks and cobra helicopters that some think they can find in Revelation.

It matches the descriptions given by historians of Jerusalem in AD 70

And lastly, the masses of bodies being eaten by eagles, vultures, crows, and other birds perfectly fits the history that we have of August of AD 70. How bad was it? Let me give you a brief description from Josephus, who was an eyewitness of the whole war. He says that the bodies that fell during the first part of the war were everywhere. Josephus says, “the whole of the country ... was filled with slaughter.” (War 4:437). He also says, “The victims thus outnumbered by far those of any previous destruction wrought by God or man.” (War 6:428). Well, when you read his descriptions of wars in the previous 2000 years of history, that is a pretty significant statement because those previous wars had dead numbering in the hundreds of thousands in one war, and approaching a million in another war. And he said this outnumbered those by far. Carcasses were everywhere. All around the city the Romans had crucified Jews who had escaped, or cut them open to search for gold in their stomachs. And inside the city both starvation and factional fighting had left the city full of bodies. Josephus says of them, “the narrow streets and the houses [were] full of the bodies of people who had died of starvation.” (War 6:355). As the streets and houses filled up, many of those bodies were thrown over the wall into the ravine, which itself was filling up. But the city continued to fill with more and more bodies. He says, “Nor was there any place in the city that had no dead bodies in it, but what was entirely covered with those that were killed either by the famine or the rebellion; and all was full of the dead bodies of such as had perished, either by that sedition or by that famine.” War 6:369). In another place he said, “And indeed the multitude of carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another, was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench” (War 6:2). When the Romans broke into the city and began to run through the streets killing everyone that they met, Josephus says that some of the streets were so filled with bodies that they were completely blocked, and no one could pass through those streets (War 6:406). But elsewhere, he says, “The ground was nowhere visible through the corpses but the soldiers had to clamber over heaps of bodies in pursuit of fugitives.” (War 6:276). Later, as the Romans tried to plunder the bodies, only the most hardened soldiers were able to do so without gagging. Josephus says, “So foul a stench from the bodies greeted the intruders that many withdrew instantly.” (War 6:431). I think you get the picture. There was a massive body count in Israel. It fits the details of this text perfectly.

B. Exposition of verses 17-18

So let's go through verses 17-21 and seek to apply them. Verse 17 says, "And I saw an angel standing in the sun..." Angels were involved in the carnage back then, and I believe they continue to be involved in the carnage we have seen in the last one hundred years. They were involved in the carnage of Rwanda, with bodies waist high, and the killing fields of Mozambique that Peter Hammond has documented so well, and in the millions killed in Cambodia and other communist countries. These are not accidents of history. These are God's judgments wrought by angels. It may seem barbaric, but it is written right into God's law that when Israel would rebel against His laws, this would be one of the judgments that God would send. Israel over and over said, "Nah, that's not going to happen. Things will continue just as they are." And Americans tend to think, "Nah, that's not going to happen. Things will continue just as they are." We have this tendency to think that we as a nation can sin against God with a high hand and still get away with it. Even Christians think that our nation will get away with it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Verse 17 goes on, "and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven..." Way too many commentaries spiritualize everything. They say that the birds aren't literal birds, but there is no agreement among the Historicists (who tend to do this) on what they symbolize. Some say they are the Goths and Vandals who devastated the Roman empire, others say that they symbolize the Turks, or the Huns, etc.¹ But while these literal birds do symbolize God's relationship to the physical creation, as per the Noahic covenant (and we will look at that in a bit), there is no reason to not take these as literal birds. We have seen that the symbols of Revelation have tended to be literal events, people, or times in history.

That literal birds would eat bodies was a curse that God put into his law. It

1 For a listing of some of the symbolic views, see Düsterdieck. He says, "The fowls (ver. 17 sq., 21) are, according to Hammond, the Goths and Vandals, who desolated the Roman Empire; according to Coccejus, the Turks, who, after the capture of Constantinople, afflicted the Catholic West; according to Hengstenb., the Huns, who prepared grievous calamities for the Germanic nations, the destroyers of the Roman Empire. Wetst. found the prophecy fulfilled in the assassination of Domitian, the last of the Flavians, and in the conquest of his soldiers (ver. 21). Grot. understands by the βασιλεῖς (ver. 19), 'Julian with his nobles,' and remarks on ver. 20: 'Theodosius the Great abolished the public sacrifices of the heathen,' and on ver. 21: 'By the decree of Christ, who used Justinian for this purpose, to punish idolaters with death.' Others, as C. a Lap., have thought that the fulfillment of the prophecy could be shown by the horrible death and burial of many heretics. So C. a Lap. cites authors who report of Luther that he committed suicide, and that at his burial not only a multitude of ravens, but also the Devil, who had come from Holland, appeared.—Luther, gloss on ver. 11: 'The word of God is opposed to the defenders of the Pope, and none of their defence is of any avail.'" Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 460.

was God's way of dishonoring those who had dishonored Him. They would receive no burial. In Deuteronomy 28:26, God told Israel, "Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away." Ezekiel 39:17-20 gives an even more graphic call of God for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field to feast on corpses until they can eat no more. Speaking of this war, Matthew 24:28 said, "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together." This is how seriously God takes national sin and rebellion. When men make the state their god, God allows that demonic state to turn the citizens into a meat grinder (so to speak). And He does so, so that people will stop trusting statism or any other form of idolatry.

But we tend to be forgetful of God's judgments in America, in Europe, and in other parts of the world. This kind of thing has happened over and over again as a kind of punishment for rebellion. Part of the reason that it's off our radar is that death tolls in our wars don't tend to be publicized by the media that much. But if you look at the death tolls of the 79 wars America has been involved in since its founding, you can see that God's hand of judgment has been very active. Was the American civil war a judgment of God? I believe it was a judgment on both North and South for their gross violations of God's laws. They were a Christian nation, should have known better, so God held them to a higher standard, and there was a massive loss of life. The same was true of World Wars I and II. We lost 405,399 soldiers in World War II. And we actually came off pretty good compared to the rest of the world. The statistics I have seen show estimates that range from 60-70 million people (both civilians and soldiers) who died in World War II. There are some studies that go as low as 16 million and other studies as high as 85 million, but every study showed a massive loss of life. Germany lost 5 million, Japan 2.3, etc. Many of us believe the Soviet losses are grossly under-reported in all of these studies.

So just as God judged both Israel and Rome during this war (and in past sermons I have documented the massive death tolls on both sides), in the past 2000 years God has been bringing His judgments through plagues, wars, famines, abortion, AIDS, and other things like floods and typhoons. Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat history. And the downward moral slide in America is an evidence that we may be heading that way once again.

And let me give a little rabbit trail digression on how it is that God can disapprove of this type of warfare and yet bring it as a judgment. How can He use what He disapproves of? Habakkuk was troubled by this. He initially

thought that it was not fair for God to use an even more evil nation than Israel was (Babylon) in order to punish Israel. But in both the book of Habakkuk and in the book of Jeremiah we see that God used Babylon to punish Israel for her transgressions, but he also judged Babylon for her cruelty and lawlessness in the way it fought against Israel. Yes, He condemns Babylon for failing to follow God's laws in how it conducted war. The fact that he allows two rebellious nations to duke it out does not mean that he approves of either nation's views on warfare. Both are tools God is using to bring judgment on both.

Now, in discussing Biblical and unbiblical views on warfare, there are basically four views of warfare out there. There are the doves who are pacifists and are opposed to all war and violence. They want peace and utopia right now. But their timing is wrong. When nations are evil, there is no way the Bible allows a nation to beat its swords into plowshares or to lay down its weapons. That would be foolishness; maybe insanity. God calls upon nations to defend their citizens. The end of this book will show how swords being traded in for plowshares will only happen as the world is pervasively Christian and pervasively following God's law. Being a pacifist is naive in the context of evil aggressors out there. So that is the first extreme view - the doves.

The opposite extreme are the hawks who are always looking for a fight and are always meddling in the affairs of other nations. America is a hawk - maybe not as hawkish as some nations, but it is overly involved in affairs that the Bible would define as none of its business. In Deuteronomy 2 there were various nations that God told Israel to leave alone. It didn't matter that those nations were evil and killed the innocent, etc; God told Israel to leave them alone. In verse 2 he said about the nations descended from Esau, "Do not meddle with them." In verse 19 He tells Israel, "And when you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them." For sure, God rebukes those who love violence. Psalm 11:5 says, "The Lord ... hates the wicked and the one who loves violence." He doesn't disapprove of violence, but He hates the one who loves violence. There is a big difference between being involved in violence and loving it. For example, General Douglas MacArthur said that he hated war; he did not like violence. But if he was going to engage in war, he was going to fight to win. That's a biblical viewpoint. In complete contrast, a friend one time told me, "I can hardly wait to go to Afghanistan and kill rag heads." I was shocked, and I asked him "Why?" His answers had nothing to do with Biblical reasons for violence. He just thought it would be cool to watch heads explode. That is

ungodly. Now, that is probably an extreme form of hawkishness. But Psalm 11:5 says that God hates those who love violence. Proverbs 3:31 warns us, “Do not envy the violent...” We are not to glorify them as so many movies do, or emulate them.

Then there is the view that moves to war only when war is imperative for defensive purposes. It’s the just war view. They only go to war as a last ditch effort. It is closer to the Biblical view, but it lacks the law of God to define it. If this defensive view of war were correct in every circumstance, then God would not have condemned Israel in this book for its defensive war against Rome. It was a defensive war. If this defensive (or just war) view of war was sufficient, then the book of Jeremiah would not have called upon Israel to submit to Babylon. Defensive actions alone are not enough to justify war. The natural-law basis for a just war theory is simply not adequate.

The Biblical view of war is that it is a necessary violence (not a necessary evil, because never commands evil, but a necessary violence) that must be strictly circumscribed by God’s law. The Bible must dictate when we go to war and when we sue for peace. And Luke 14:32 makes it quite clear that there are times when the most righteous thing to do is to pragmatically sue for peace lest your nation get wiped out. And the Old Testament law shows us what that looks like. The law must dictate who can go to war and who must stay at home. It must dictate not only goals and trajectories, but the means and methods of war. For example, in Biblical law, the end never justifies the means, as so many torture methods have done. Torture is unbiblical. War is engaged in to glorify God and as a stewardship trust of citizens that must be protected. It can sometimes be offensive and sometimes defensive. In fact, sometimes God calls upon nations to engage in a preemptive first strike attack. That can be Biblical. But never does any abstract principle dictate what happens. There is no simplistic judicial/ethical divide - that concept has gotten too many Reconstructionists to go astray. The Bible gives specifics. And Bahnsen does a nice job of teaching those specifics in his lectures on war. By the way, God’s methods usually result in a minimum of loss of life because it motivates people to never again attack a Christian nation or the other nation will live to regret it. God’s methods definitely tend to be a deterrent to aggressors. Sometimes horrendous destruction in a battle can save even more lives. Our so-called more civilized ways of doing things end up costing far more lives.

So even though we are seeing this Israel-Rome conflict as a judgment of God upon both nations, God does not endorse the methods of war. I just wanted to make that crystal clear.

Well, let's move on. In verse 17 the angel calls the birds of heaven: "Come, gather together to the great dinner of God..." What's shocking about this invitation to a dinner of God is that it happens almost immediately after the call to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. But commentators point out that these two meals are connected by the concept of sacrifice. I think Chilton's comments on that connection are speculative and far-fetched. But it is true that there is an allusion to Ezekiel 39 where the birds of the air are summoned to feast on the corpses after that war (and that war occurred in the time of Esther), and God five times speaks of that grisly feast for animals and birds as a sacrificial meal. What is meant by a sacrificial meal? Well, after a sacrifice, there was a meal that sealed fellowship between God and man. Well, here it is not men who are invited to the feast, but birds. So it is more akin to the Noahic covenant where destruction of man brings about some peace between the rest of creation and God.

Well, if the Lamb's sacrifice is rejected (as it was by both Israel and Rome), there can be no fellowship with Him - and even creation suffers. Either Christ is crucified on our behalf and eaten or rebels are destroyed and eaten. When animals were sacrificed, people would pass between the pieces and it symbolically declared, "If I break this covenant, may I be cut apart like this animal has been and be eaten." So it is an appropriate image for those who rejected Jesus.

In this meal, the only ones who were at peace with God were the birds. They are the ones invited to the feast. So it is a hint that God's judgments on men help to cleanse the land and to restore some stability to the very creation, which groans and travails over sin. God cares about the physical environment. And R.J. Rushdoony did a marvelous job in one of his talks in outlining the connections with increased travail in nature in proportion to the increased rebellion of man and a decrease in catastrophes in nature as the corporate righteousness of nations increased. There tend to be many more tornadoes, typhoons, plagues, earthquakes, and other natural catastrophes during times of great moral declension than during times of great righteousness. And so this is a great prelude to chapters 20-22, which show that when righteousness fills the earth, the very creation itself will find Christ's redemption changing it.

Verse 18 continues talking to the birds: "so that you may eat flesh of kings and flesh of commanders and flesh of the mighty and flesh of horses along with their riders, even the flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great." Some commentators cannot stomach this. Several of my commentaries devote one or two sentences to verses 17-18. They just skip

over it and act like it doesn't exist. Others boldly express their dislike. Jürgen Roloff calls this an "exceedingly crass image,"² and Barclay claims, "[this is a] bloodthirsty picture ... far more in line with Old Testament apocalyptic expectations than with the gospel of Jesus Christ."³ Well, I would say that He has misunderstood the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 24:28 Jesus guaranteed that this grisly meal would happen within one generation - and He ought to know what the Gospel is. Jesus said, "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together." God defines reality, not us. God defines what is consistent with the Gospel, not us.

But far from being contrary to the Gospel, this deliberate contrast between the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, to which all are invited, and this supper for birds showcases God's incredibly generous grace. We deserve exactly the same judgment that the people in verses 17-21 had received, but instead God invited us to be a part of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Incredible! In Matthew 22, Jesus speaks of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and says that all were invited. He made it clear that those who would get destroyed would be those who refused to come to Christ. As Mounce worded it, "The good news is that people need not bear the just punishment due their sin but that Another [Jesus] has paid the price on their behalf. Only when people refuse forgiveness must they bear the penalty for their wickedness."⁴ But it shows the just consequences of rejecting the Gospel that was offered in the previous snapshot. All have the opportunity to be saved and to be guests at God's banquet table. But those who do not will be dealt with as they deserve.

And in terms of who deserves what, I want you to notice that God does not let anyone off the hook in verse 18. As Romans 3 words it, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." In this verse we see not only kings, commanders, and mighty being judged, but also ordinary citizens, whether those are free, slaves, small, great. The word "small" would include children. People instinctively recoil at that idea, but Scripture is clear that apart from the atonement of Jesus, children are deserving of not

2 Jürgen Roloff, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 220.

3 William Barclay, *Revelation of John*, vol. 2, *The New Daily Study Bible* (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 207.

4 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 357.

only this judgment, but of hell. Psalm 58:3 says, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.” Children need a Savior too. Isaiah 48:8 says, “For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb.” All are offered salvation, but all are worthy of judgment. It is only because Jesus endured God’s wrath for us that any of us can escape. So rather than criticizing God, we should be grateful to Him for His generous offer - and that He even welcomes our children into the covenant. Praise God!

Verse 19 continues, “And I saw the Beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the One riding the horse and against His army.” The Greek for gathered together is in the perfect tense, middle voice. The perfect tense indicates that the gathering had previously happened with an abiding result - they are still gathered together. But the gathering happened months before. It actually happened in late AD 69. The middle voice indicates that someone else did the gathering. Beale is probably right when he says, “The kings and their armies do not gather under their own power but under Satanic and demonic influence.”⁵ But the phrase, “to make war,” is in the aorist tense. They had earlier gathered together to fight against Jesus and His armies, and that initial resistance to Christ is past, and their time is up. God does not allow these two demons to engage in a new battle. The beast and false prophet are captured before a battle can happen. So it is a little bit clearer in the Greek that the gathering happened in the past. And we examined how demons gathered human armies together to fight in Israel way back in chapter 17.

Verse 20 says,

So the Beast was captured, and with him the False prophet, the one who performed signs in his presence (by which he had deceived those who had received the mark of the Beast and those who worshiped his image). The two were thrown alive into the Lake of Fire that burns with brimstone.

I will try to tease that long verse apart into different topics. First, God is now going to deal with the demon-princes of Rome and of Israel. The demon prince over Rome (the one who possessed Titus) was the Beast. The demon prince over Israel (the one who possessed Rabbi ben Zakkai) was the False Prophet. Both them were earlier said to have come up out of the Abyss. Both of them were demons. And we have looked in depth at those two in the past. But here they are being disposed of in a way quite different from the way that Satan will be disposed of.

5 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 967.

Chapter 20 will show what Jesus will deal with Satan at exactly this same time - he will bind Satan in the Abyss until the Second Coming. That means that Satan is currently in the heart of the earth. Most other demons are not, but Satan is. But there is special treatment given to the beast and the false prophet in these verses. They won't even be allowed to join Satan in the Abyss. They will be the first ones in all of human history to be bound in the lake of fire. Demons can be released from the Abyss, but there doesn't seem to be any coming back from the Lake of Fire. Anybody who goes there is permanently there.

If you turn to Chapter 20:14, I will show you the difference between the Abyss (where Satan will be bound) and the lake of fire (where these two were cast). The Abyss is a synonym for the Greek word Hades and the Hebrew word Sheol. Hades/Sheol was in the heart of the earth. It's always down (without exception). OK, look at Revelation 20:14. It says,

And Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death, the Lake of Fire. 15 And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Hades is in the heart of the earth. Revelation 20 says that it will be emptied out and thrown into the Lake of Fire at the Second Coming. But it wasn't just unbelievers that were in Hades before Christ's resurrection. All the saints also went to Sheol/Hades. Ephesians 4:9 says that Jesus' soul descended into the lower parts of the earth. Acts 2:31 says the same thing, but uses the word "Hades." It says that Jesus' soul was in Hades for three days and three nights. That's why some people mistakenly think He was in hell for three days and three nights. But He was not. He told the thief that he would join Him in paradise that same day. Hades had two parts according to Luke 16. There was an upper portion called paradise, where the beggar was, and there was a lower place of torment, where the rich man went. Jesus emptied the upper portion of Hades at His resurrection and led all believers on an Exodus to heaven. So the instant a believer dies today, he goes to heaven. He no longer goes to Hades or Sheol. But that's not true of unbelievers. Unbelievers go to lower Hades, which is a provisional place of fire and torment. They are not in the Lake of Fire yet. But this verse says that at the Second Coming, Hades will be emptied out and everyone will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

So what is the Lake of Fire? We are told in Matthew 25:41 that it is already created and thus is something that is already in existence. So it should be something somewhere in our universe. But apparently it exists in what Jesus called "outer darkness" (Matt. 25:30; 8:12; 22:13). So how can you have fire and that fire be in outer darkness? This is only a theory, but it is based on the

fact that Scripture describes the lake of fire as something that is a currently created reality and it is currently in outer darkness. Outer space is outer darkness for sure. But imagine a giant sun placed by God way outside the visible range of light from any other star. That would be outer darkness. And the sun is literally a shoreless lake of liquid gases that are on fire. That is different from Hades which isn't outer at all. It is inner. It is in the heart of the earth, or the lower parts of the earth. Matthew 11:23 speaks of being brought down to Hades. Proverbs 1:12 speaks of the dead being brought down to Sheol; down to the Abyss. Samuel's soul came up out of Sheol. So Hades/Sheol is not outer; it is inner.

So it is my belief that in AD 70, Satan was confined to the Abyss in the heart of the earth, but that the beast and the false prophet were the first to be cast into the Lake of fire. Keep in mind that the beast and false prophet were first and foremost, demons. Revelation 11:7 says that the beast ascends up out of the Abyss. Revelation 17:18 says the same thing. And Revelation 20:10 says that when Satan is finally cast into the Lake of Fire at the Second Coming, the Beast and False Prophet will already be there. Again it shows a distinction.

And note that God does not destroy them, but casts them in alive. Every soul in Hades is alive (and there are Scriptures of unbelievers talking with each other and with newcomers in Hades), and every soul in the Lake of Fire is alive. Currently, it appears that there are only two lonely occupants there. But they will be joined by others at the Second Coming.

Oh, by the way, that is yet another proof that hell does not instantly kill souls. If the the Beast and False Prophet were thrown into the Lake of Fire in AD 70, and if Revelation 20:10 says that they will still be there at the end of history, then people can exist in the Lake of Fire for thousands of years. It's not annihilationism.

The middle part of verse 20 describes the False Prophet as, "the one who performed signs in his presence (by which he had deceived those who had received the mark of the Beast and those who worshiped his image)..." Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakkai had no power in himself to perform the miracles that he performed. He did it with the help of this demon. And we already looked at the incredible miracles that this demon named "False Prophet" performed in the presence of the demon beast, who possessed Titus. The miracles were designed to convince the Jews to worship the image of the beast. And we saw that it was successful, and we saw that the Jews continued to worship the image of the beast at least for the next three

and a half years - at least up to AD 74, if not beyond. But demons move people to false worship.

Verse 21 says, “And the rest were killed by the sword that proceeds from the mouth of the One riding the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.” The rest of whom? The rest of the ones that he has just finished talking about in verses 17-18. They were killed by the sword, but the Beast and the False Prophet can’t be killed, because they are spirits; they are demons. Dennis Johnson is an Idealist, but he makes a good point when he says, “The fact that the beast and false prophet are thrown alive into the fiery lake, whereas their followers are slain by the sword, confirms that the beast and the false prophet, like the harlot of Babylon, symbolize not particular human individuals...”⁶ He thinks they are institutional structures rather than demons, but he recognizes that they are deliberately being distinguished from the humans that can be killed with the sword. He goes on, “If the beast and the false prophet portrayed were human beings, there would be no reason for Christ to spare them the first death (physical death) before casting them into the second death, the lake of fire (20:14). Their followers will experience both.”⁷ I think he is spot-on in this observation.

So it is yet another hint that the Beast and the False Prophet were demons who were going to be confined to the Lake of Fire in outer darkness forever and ever. This is not talking about the death of Titus or the death of Rabbi ben Zakkai, but the judgment of the demons who possessed them. There were plenty of other demons to take their place, but God takes care of these to show the trajectory that Zechariah speaks about - of all demons being cleansed out of the world. Eventually there will be no demons on earth. They will either be confined to Hades or to the Lake of Fire. It’s my interpretation that most (if not all) remaining demons will eventually be confined to the Abyss, not to the Lake of Fire. I don’t think any other than the Beast and the False Prophet will be in the Lake of Fire when Christ comes back. And I’ll show the proof of that when we get part way through chapter 20.

Now, one question that might arise in your heads is, “Why was Satan not confined in the Lake of Fire just like the Beast and False Prophet were? After all, he was the most powerful demon.” I’m glad you asked. I believe the reason is because God still has a purpose for him at the end of history. On the day of resurrection at the end of history, Satan and all demons will also be released from the Abyss, and they will try to gather all newly

6 Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), p. 278.

7 *Ibid.*

resurrected humans and all other unleashed demons (trillions of them) into one last desperate battle. That will be the first time in human history where everyone who is non-elect (well, with the exception of the Beast and False Prophet) will be allowed to try their hardest to fight against God. But before they can even engage the elect, God defeats them, and involves the saints in judging them. So, while God has no more purpose for the Beast or the False Prophet, He has one last necessary purpose for Satan to showcase His grace and His judgment. And that will occur on the last day of history.

So that is the meaning of the passage. The only additional comment that I would make in conclusion is to have you ask yourself if Rome and Israel were really any worse than we are in America. Both Rome and Israel in these last days were engaged in Transvestitism and Homosexuality, but so is America. Both Rome and Israel rejected Biblical law, but so has America. Both Rome and Israel persecuted the church. OK, that would be one place where America has been better, but there have certainly been growing attempts to persecute Christians in the last decade. My point is, without repentance, America is heading down a dangerous road. We need to pray as the remnant did, evangelize as the remnant did, seek to influence as the remnant did, and pray for Reformation. And if God wills not to send Reformation, we need to also seek to be prepared to face tough times. Will the tough times come? Only God knows. As we saw last week, one of Jesus' crowns represents the mystery of His providential timing. He has purposes much more complex than our wishes might be. But the general principles tell us to prepare.

And that's all I'll say this morning. May God encourage you to be totally faithful to Him in tough times. Amen.