

Series Revelation

Scripture #30 Revelation 19:11-21

The second coming of Jesus is an indispensable theme in New Testament theology. Just as the first advent of Jesus was a literal fact, verified by eyewitnesses and written records, the return of Jesus will also be literal and unmistakable. Through His first advent death and resurrection, Jesus won a great victory over the powers of evil. Upon His return to earth, He will complete the purposes of God secured by that victory. He will thoroughly purge creation of evil, a condition which will last for eternity.

I want to expand a little bit on this theme of theology. The first advent began when the Father sent His Son to earth. In his Gospel account the Apostle John wrote: “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (*John 1:14*), and in his letter he wrote: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us” (*I John 1:1-2*).

Concerning His return to earth, the New Testament declares that Jesus will return to earth 1) personally (*I Thessalonians 4:16*); 2) physically in the same way he ascended (*Acts 1:11*), that is, He will be visible and tangible; 3) publically: “every eye will see Him” (*Revelation 1:7*), with the result that all the nations will mourn when they “see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky” (*Matthew 24:30*); and, 4) gloriously and powerfully (*I Corinthians 15:42-44; Matthew 24:30b*).

Sometime in the future Jesus will reenter this space-time world to complete His redemptive program on earth. He will reverse the effects of sin which were introduced by Adam and Eve. He will liberate creation from bondage to decay, redeem believers’ bodies (*Romans 8:21-23*), and judge evildoers. He will “destroy all dominion, authority and power” that opposes God. In fact, He will destroy death itself (*I Corinthians 15:24-26*). I hope you understand the essentiality of Jesus’ return to earth.

There have been two detailed portrayals of Jesus in the previous visions seen by the Apostle John. The first was Jesus walking among the lampstands; this was symbolic of His presence among the churches during this age (*Revelation 1:9-20; chapters 2 & 3*). In the second portrayal, Jesus was in heaven. He had the appearance of a slaughtered Lamb and He was at the center of the throne of God Almighty. In the passage for today, we will read about the third portrayal of Jesus. He will return to earth as the conquering King at the end of the age.

Read Revelation 19:11-21

In the passage we thought about last week we were given a description of Jesus from the perspective of the believer. He had “condemned the great prostitute,” Babylon, and “avenged the blood of his servants,” and, most importantly, He was preparing the wedding between Himself and His bride, the Church. The reading today describes Jesus from the perspective of unbelievers. They will see Jesus as the Warrior Messiah coming to do battle with them.

This episode begins with the opening of heaven. There have been several “openings” of heaven in this book, each one wider than the previous one. At the beginning of chapter 4 John saw “a door standing open in heaven.” In the course of his visions, the temple sanctuary in heaven was opened revealing the ark of the covenant (*Revelation 11:19*). Now in chapter 19 all of heaven has been opened to make way for the departure of the Messiah and His following armies.

The names Jesus and Christ are not used in this passage, but there is no mistaking the Rider on the white horse. Four descriptive titles are given. In verse 11 the Rider is called “Faithful and True.” Back in chapter 3 Jesus described Himself as “the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation” (*Revelation 3:14*).

These terms relate to His allegiance to and service to the Father. He was faithful and true to the Father by always doing those things the Father wanted Him to do (*John 5:19*). Jesus completed His work on earth by being faithful unto death (*John 17:4*). Jesus was faithful to His followers by providing them with the Father’s life through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He will be faithful in defeating all His enemies and handing over the kingdom to the Father.

The last part of verse 11 states that the Rider will judge and make war with justice. War against His enemies will not be an act of personal vengefulness nor an arbitrary manifestation of divine power. It will be an act of righteousness reflecting the holy nature God. Similar statements were made about the Father. For example, when the bowl judgments were being poured out, the angels said, "You are just in your judgments," and the souls under the altar responded, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (*Revelation 16:4, 7*). The retribution about to be enacted upon the beast and his followers by the Rider is perfectly compatible with truth and justice.

Next, we are informed that the rider's "eyes are like blazing fire." This is another descriptive phrase which was used in the early chapters of the book (*see Revelation 1:14; 2:18*). The eyes represent the all-searching and all-knowing gaze of Christ. Nothing is hidden from Him. He has all the information He needs to judge properly and correctly.

On His head are many crowns, indicating His unlimited sovereignty. He has earned His sovereignty by virtue of His death and resurrection. He has been "exalted to the highest place and given the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (*Philippians 2:9-11*). As I said earlier, He will destroy "every rule and every authority and power" other than His own (*I Corinthians 15:24*).

The second descriptive title is a mystery name to us. It is a "name that no one knows but Jesus himself." Probably we are not permitted to know this name because our human mind's cannot grasp or appreciate its meaning. Jesus is infinite and cannot reveal all of Himself to us because of our limited spiritual comprehension. For example, how is it possible for us to understand the love of the Father who sent His Son to die on the cross, or the eagerness of the Son to die for us, or to understand what it meant for the eternal Son to be separated from fellowship with the Father when He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Matthew 27:46*). There are many mysteries about God that our finite minds cannot adequately grasp. Paul wrote, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then (when perfection comes) we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully" (*I Corinthians 13:10, 12*). Believers will have all eternity to discover the depths of the nature of God.

In verse 13 we read that the rider is “dressed in a robe dipped in blood.” There are two opinions about this robe. Most commentators think the blood on the garment is the result of conflict and battle. They base their opinion on a prophecy of Isaiah. In a reference to the Messiah, the question is asked, “Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah (these were two countries which were the enemies of God’s people) with his garments stained crimson?” A second question is asked: “Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?” The answer from the Messiah is, “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come” (*Isaiah 63:1-4*). That prophecy fits the context of the Warrior Messiah of Revelation 19.

Some commentators have another opinion. They suggest that the blood is Christ’s own from the cross and that it is a reminder of Christ as Redeemer. This opinion is based on previous verses in Revelation, for example, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God” (*Revelation 5:9*). And we have talked about those who “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (*Revelation 7:14*). Both explanations about the robe are good. I don’t know which is better.

The third title given to the Rider is “the Word of God.” This title represents a very significant truth. When Jesus was on the earth, He was like a book which revealed to people the characteristics and purposes of God. Think about Jesus as the living Word of God. The power of God’s word was manifested at the time of creation. He spoke and it was done. Both John and Paul taught that it was through Christ that the worlds came into being (*John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; see also Hebrews 1:2*).

At the end of the age, this same “Word of God,” Jesus Christ, God’s Son, will be the active agent in purging evil and sin from the universe. We will learn at the end of the passage today that it is only necessary for Jesus to speak in order to defeat His enemies.

As the rider heads out from the heavenly realms, He is followed by the “armies (plural) of heaven.” The identity of the armies is debated by commentators. Undoubtedly, the heavenly hosts of angels are included in these armies. There are numerous verses which declare that angels will be with Jesus on His return. For examples, “The son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels” (*Matthew 16:27*); and “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels” (*Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; also see II Thessalonians 1:6-7*).

It is also likely that the resurrected saints are included. There is an earlier text in Revelation which reads, “The kings along with the beast will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them ... and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers” (*Revelation 17:14*). Perhaps we can conclude that all of God’s followers, both heavenly creatures and earthly redeemed, will want to be with Jesus when He confronts the evil of the world.

The Rider has three Old Testament symbols which will be used in the implementation of judgment: a sharp sword which juts out of His mouth, an iron scepter, and a winepress.

The sword is the symbol of authority over life and death. The Rider will have authority to “strike down the nations.” The sword is linked to the Rider as “the Word of God.” According to verse 21, the only weapon involved in the warfare is this “sword.” This is confirmed by Paul when he wrote, “the lawless one (the Antichrist) will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth (*II Thessalonians 2:8*).

The second metaphor is that of ruling with a rod of iron. This symbol comes from Psalm 2, where the Father said to the Son, “Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery” (*Psalm 2:8-9*). In the context of Revelation chapter 19, this “iron scepter” is another instrument of authority, as well as another weapon of destruction.

The third metaphor is that of the “winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.” This metaphor appeared in chapter 14 when we read about the “reaping” of unbelievers and their being trampled in the winepress. The nouns translated “wrath” and “anger” are found 13 times in Revelation. They are indications of God’s hatred of sin and evil.

The fourth title of the Rider is “King of kings and Lord of lords.” He wears this name “on His robe and on His thigh.” The name designates the absolute sovereignty of the Rider. The Apostle Paul wrote about the absolute authority of Jesus several times. In Ephesians he wrote that Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the age to come” (*Ephesians 1:20-21*). I have already quoted the passage in Philippians chapter 2: “He has the name that is above every name” (*Philippians 2:9-10*). The Rider has the authority to smite the nations and tread the winepress because He is above all other authorities. His title is displayed so that everyone can see and read it.

Now we come to the action part of this passage. John saw the military forces of earthdwellers drawn up to make war against the rider on the horse and His followers. At the head of these forces is the beast, Antichrist. In an earlier passage we learned that demonic spirits had gone forth to assemble the kings of the whole world for battle (*see Revelation 16:13-14; 17:2, 18; 18:3*). The armies of Jesus are descending toward them. The location is a place named Armageddon.

Before the armies engage, John saw an angel who was organizing an unusual banquet. There are two banquets in chapter 19. Last week we thought about the wedding supper of the Lamb. Those who belong to Christ will share in that banquet. The banquet described in today’s passage will have birds of carrion as guests, and those who belong to the beast will be the menu for “the great supper of God.”

It is almost disappointing that the battle with Antichrist is not described. There are no details. Actually there is no engagement of armies. The vision turns immediately to the defeat of Antichrist. He was unable to resist the authority of Christ. This is the most anti-climatic battle ever. It is over before it begins.

The beast and false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire. The beast had been very successful as the personification of secular power in opposition to God and the church. The false prophet had been very successful in using false religion to turn earthdwellers from the ways of God to evil practices. However, against the authority of the Rider, they were powerless, and they became inhabitants of the lake of fire.

The phrase, “the lake of fire,” occurs only here in Revelation, although the idea of punishment by fire is prominent in Jewish writings. Hell is pictured in the New Testament as a place of fire and also as a place of darkness (*Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30*). These descriptions are metaphors to describe final, irremedial, and eternal judgment.

Verse 21 describes in very concise words the destruction of the armies of the Antichrist. The military forces are slain by the sword that issues from the mouth of Jesus. The power of the Word of God which created the universe is the same power which brings to an end the earthly forces of evil.

As believers, we need to keep Titus 2:11-14 in mind:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”