



THE REIGN OF SATAN

The End of The Counterfeits

October 8, 2017

Revelation 19

Rejoicing in Heaven

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
2 for his judgments are true and just;
for he has judged the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her immorality,
and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

3 Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah!
The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” 5 And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
small and great.”

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The Rider on a White Horse

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

17 Then 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.” 19 And 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. 20 And 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. 21 And 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.

vi. A thanksgiving for the judgment of Babylon (19:1–5)

The passage on the judgment of Babylon concludes with a mighty thanksgiving in heaven at the conclusion of God’s judgments.

1. John tells us that he heard ‘as a great voice’ (NIV paraphrases). This is somewhat puzzling, for there seems no doubt that he is telling us of the song of a heavenly host. It is a further example of his reserve in describing heavenly realities. The singers are not named, but they are probably angels, the throng of 5:11 (though Mounce thinks of the church). They sing a song of praise which begins, *Hallelujah!* This transliterates a Hebrew expression meaning ‘Praise Jah’, i.e. ‘Praise God’. It is the typical Hebrew note of praise. The word is found four times in this passage (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6), and not again in the New Testament. The Hebrew equivalent occurs a number of times in the Psalms, but it is always translated. This is thus the only passage in the English Bible where ‘Hallelujah’ occurs. The song ascribes to God *salvation, glory and power*. The events just described form an illustration of all three.

2. The first *for* gives the justification for the outburst of praise in a general statement, the second (before *he has condemned*; NIV omits) justifies the first with a specific example, the overthrow of the great city. As often, her overthrow is described not in terms of sheer power, but as a judgment (*ekrinen*, ‘he has judged’). Moffatt misses the note of justice with ‘he has doomed the great Harlot’ and NIV obscures it with *he has condemned*. But there is more than doom. Justice is done. *The great prostitute* corrupted the earth with *her adulteries*, and all heaven rejoices accordingly at her overthrow.

We must bear in mind in all this our constant readiness to be corrupted. ‘The world likes a complacent, reasonable religion, and so it is always ready to revere some pale Galilean image of Jesus, some meagre anaemic Messiah, and to give Him a moderate rational homage ... The truth is that we have often committed adultery with alien ideologies, confounded the Gospel with the religions of nature, and imbibed the wine of pagan doctrines and false principles and deceitful practices. We have sought to bend the will of God to serve the ends of man, to alter the Gospel and shape the Church to conform to the fashions of the times’ (Torrance).

Ultimately this is of no avail. The great whore is judged. ‘The moral law can no more be broken than the law of gravitation; it can only be illustrated!’ (Kepler). Perhaps we should add a comment of Love: ‘We like to think of a Hallelujah chorus in the style of Handel, where the Hallelujah is the triumphant worship of the reigning Lord. And John comes eventually to such a chorus. But he is realistic enough to know that first there must be the equally triumphant rejoicing over the downfall of evil at the hand of God.’ The great whore corrupted the earth. But she did more; she shed the blood of God’s servants. She had to be called to account.

3. A second time the throng praised God. It is not clear whether on this occasion the

song consists of one word, *Hallelujah*, with the information added that the *smoke* of the city ascended perpetually (cf. Isa. 34:10), or whether the latter is part of the song. Either way we must not think of their attitude as negative. Their God is a Creator. The destruction of the great whore is but the prelude to the new era: 'their hallelujah rings out the old, but it also rings in the new' (Kiddle).

4. The inhabitants of heaven who are closest to God join in the praise. The twenty-four elders and the four living ones (the last time these are mentioned in Revelation) prostrate themselves and worship. The specific mention of *the throne* points us to God in his majesty. They utter two words, *Amen*, which indicates their assent to what has been said, and *Hallelujah*, the great word of praise (cf. Ps. 106:48 for the conjunction of these two words).

5. Yet once more John reports a voice whose speaker is not named. It came *from the throne*, and so must be thought of as emanating from God. But the words *Praise our God* (for 'my God' cf. 3:12) make it clear that the speaker is not God or Christ. The voice calls on all God's people to join in the chorus of praise. The lowliness of men before God is suggested in the double description *servants (douloi, 'slaves')* and *you who fear him*, while the universality of the appeal is sounded in the *all* and in the *both small and great*.

c. The marriage of the Lamb (19:6–10)

The triumph of the servants of God is now brought out with the imagery of a heavenly marriage. The church is seen as the bride of Christ.

6. Once more John speaks of an unidentified voice. This time, however, he describes it in some detail, though with his usual reserve in speaking of heavenly realities. His thrice-repeated *like* shows that the voice is not exactly 'the voice of a great multitude', etc. but a voice resembling these things. It is likened to the sound of *a great multitude*, to that of 'many waters' (cf. 1:15 and the note there), and to mighty *thunder* (cf. 18:2 for *ischyros* used of a voice). The voice then is both powerful and musical (cf. 14:2). As with others in this chapter, the voice begins with *Hallelujah*. The note of praise is strong and sustained. The reason given is not the overthrow of Babylon, though that cannot be out of mind. It is rather that *our Lord God Almighty reigns* (or, taking the aorist as inceptive, 'has entered on his reign', NEB). The positive note is struck. For *Almighty* see the note on 1:8.

7. The voice calls on those who hear to *rejoice* and be exultant (for this combination, cf. Matt. 5:12). After what has gone we naturally think that *glory* is to be ascribed to God because his power has been so strikingly displayed in the destruction of the city. But not so. The voice concerns itself not with the past, but with the future. It calls to praise because the marriage of the Lamb is about to take place. The *bride has made herself ready*. This imagery is fairly widespread in the Bible. Israel is often thought of as Yahweh's bride (Isa. 54:6; Ezek. 16:8ff.; Hos. 2:14ff.; etc.), and marriage symbolism is not uncommon in the Gospels (Matt. 22:2ff.; 25:1ff.; Mark 2:19; John 3:29). In this book marriage imagery is employed in 19:9; 21:2, 9; 22:17 (some think the supper in 3:20 may also be understood in the same

way). We would have expected here the word ‘bride’ (*nymphē*, as in 18:23; 21:2, 9; 22:17, and as NIV translates here) instead of ‘wife’ (*gynē*). Nothing seems to turn on the choice of word, however.

8. The song concludes with the affirmation that the bride was given *fine linen, bright and clean* to wear (contrast the clothing of the harlot, 17:4; 18:16). John adds the explanation that this linen is ‘the righteousness of the saints’. This is usually understood as NIV, *the righteous acts* ... But the word *dikaiōma* never seems elsewhere to have the meaning ‘righteous acts’ (perhaps Baruch 2:19?). It always means ‘ordinance’, or something of the kind. ‘Sentence of justification’ would be much more in accordance with New Testament usage (see note on 15:4). The plural indicates that many individuals are involved. Such a meaning seems demanded in this context by the verb *was given*. The *dikaiōmata* were given to the saints, not provided by them. The white robes of the multitude in 7:9, 14 were not provided by any righteous act on the part of the wearers, but were the result of washing in ‘the blood of the Lamb’. So is it here.

9. Now comes a command to John to *write*, which emphasizes the importance of what follows. Earlier he was commanded to write the whole book (1:11, 19), and to write to each of the seven churches (chs. 2–3). He was forbidden to write what the seven thunders said (10:4), but was instructed to write down the little saying about the dead who die in the Lord (14:13). He will be commanded to write down yet another saying (21:5). For *blessed* ... see note on 1:3. Those bidden to *the wedding supper of the Lamb* are described in terms of their call (there may be a hint of permanence in the perfect participle *keklēmenoi*). The divine initiative is important.

The speaker adds that these are *the true words of God*, thus adding solemn emphasis. Some have wondered that these words should be thus singled out, for they do not appear to be more than usually noteworthy (some extend it to include all or part of chs. 17–18). But they had great point for the church in the conditions in which she found herself. In the troubled days of persecution it did need emphasis that it was the persecuted saints who were blessed, not their persecutors.

10. John prostrated himself to *worship* the speaker. This means that he thought him divine (there are one or two places in the Old Testament where men prostrate themselves before angels, as Num. 22:31, 1 Chr. 21:16; but these refer to homage, not worship).

There is no place in Christianity for the worship of any but God. John is immediately checked with ‘See not’ (*hora mē*), where the abruptness lends emphasis to the prohibition. It is clear that some early Christians were tempted to worship angels (Col. 2:18). This passage rebukes and discourages the practice.

The angel links himself with John by calling himself *a fellow-servant with you*. There are not unimportant differences between angels and men, but the really significant thing is that they are both ‘servants’ (*douloi*) of their common Lord. The angel further belongs to those who *hold to the testimony of Jesus*, explained as *the spirit of prophecy*. There are ambiguities

here. *The testimony of Jesus* might mean ‘the testimony which Jesus bore’ (and is now committed to his servants), or it might mean ‘the testimony borne to Jesus’. If we take the former meaning, the meaning is that the message Jesus gave is the spirit, the heart of all prophecy. ‘Jesus and his revelation of God, which Paul calls “the mind of Christ”, is the content of the prophet’s message as it is of what John had been told to write in his book’ (Preston and Hanson). Or perhaps that message is the burden of the Spirit who inspired the prophets. If we accept the latter meaning, the significance is that the true spirit of prophecy always manifests itself in bearing witness to Jesus. The Old Testament prophets, New Testament prophets like John, angels: they all alike bear witness to the Son of God.

It is not easy to decide between these, and it is quite possible that the ambiguity is intentional. At any rate, both meanings are true, and we may profitably see both here. The angel makes one other point when he commands John to *worship God*. Worship is to be offered to him alone.

d. The final victory (19:11–20:15)

The great victory has been won. The power of evil has been broken. There remains only to complete the final ordering of things, by putting the wicked away permanently and introducing the righteous to heaven. The preceding section has prepared us for a vision of the Bridegroom. But, as often, John surprises us. He gives us instead a vision of a Warrior.

i. One called ‘the Word of God’ (19:11–16)

The vision of ‘the Word of God’ in all his splendour leaves no doubt as to the final dominion of the risen Lord.

11. John saw *heaven standing open* (cf. 4:1). And he saw vividly *a white horse*. The colour signifies victory (see note on 6:2). In the following description almost everything said of Christ has a parallel or a near parallel elsewhere. The one really distinctive thing is the white horse. The new thought here accordingly is that the Christ now goes to his final triumph. Some identify the rider here with the one in chapter 6, but there seems no reason for this. The only point in common is the colour of the horse, and this is not sufficient to prove the point.

John gives a detailed description. First comes the name, which is fitting, for the name expresses the person. He is called *Faithful and True* (cf. 3:14). In accordance with the character expressed in these terms it is ‘in righteousness’ (*with justice*, NIV) that *he judges and makes war* (cf. Isa. 11:4). The present tenses of the verbs point to his habitual action rather than to any one specific occasion. There is no vindictiveness, no lust of conquest. Both verbs are important for John’s readers. That he judges mattered immensely in view of the injustices with which they were confronted. And that he makes war must have appealed to people who were persecuted by the mighty and thus looked for a strong helper.

12. *His eyes are like blazing fire* (as in 1:14). He searches out all things. Nothing can be hidden from him. There is also a suggestion of majesty, which is further brought out with the *many crowns* (*diadēmata*, crowns of royalty) *on his head*. He exercised widespread dominion. *He has a name written* (where is not said; NIV inserts *on him*), known only to himself. For the significance of the name in antiquity see note on 2:17. In verses 11 and 13 the name expresses what can be known of Christ's being. Here we are reminded that there are hidden depths; Christ's person can never be completely understood by his creation. It is possible that there is another thought. Those who practiced magic believed that to know the name gave power over him whose name it was. John may well be saying that no-one has power over Christ. He is supreme. His name is known only to himself.

13. *He is dressed* (perfect tense) *in a robe dipped* (perfect again; perhaps both indicate permanency) *in blood*. This is surely a reference to Calvary; Christ overcame by shedding his blood. Most recent commentators hold that it is the blood of a defeated foe, and indeed, Charles says, 'the idea that the blood on His Vesture is His own ... cannot be entertained'. It is not impossible that both ideas are in mind, but it is more than difficult to hold that John writes of blood without a thought of the blood shed on the cross. In this book he repeatedly makes the point that it is in his capacity as the 'Lamb as though slain' that Christ conquers. He overcame, not by shedding the blood of others, but by shedding his own. Besides, at this point the battle has not yet been joined (not until vv. 19–20), nor the winepress trodden. Moreover his sword is the Word (v. 15). John is surely saying 'In the power of suffering love, Christ rides forth conquering' (Stoffel).

Now for the third time we have a reference to *his name*. He is called *the Word of God* (cf. John 1:1). 'The Word' was an expression full of meaning to people of varied backgrounds. Its use by certain Greek philosophers, notably Heraclitus and the Stoics, had familiarized people with the idea that the Word was the rational principle pervading the universe, a kind of world soul. Among the Hebrews it was a reverent periphrasis for the divine name. To both Jew and Greek 'the Word of God' pointed to what was supremely important and supremely significant. This is the only place in Scripture where the full expression 'the Word of God' is applied to Christ (though cf. John 1:1; 1 John 1:1).

14. Heaven's *armies* followed him, also on *white horses*. Their clothing resembles that of the bride in verse 8 (though here *leukon*, 'white', replaces *lampron*, 'bright', 'splendid'). They are probably angels rather than the saints, for the saints are rather the bride (v. 7). Swete agrees that angels are meant and comments on the fact that they are clothed in white, whereas their Leader's robe is dipped in blood: 'He only has had experience of mortal conflict; for them bloodshed and death are impossible.' Though they are called *armies* there is no mention of weapons and neither here nor elsewhere are they said to take martial action. The victory over evil is won by their Leader alone.

15. After this brief glance at his armies we come back to the Word. There is a stern side to his nature, and John speaks of *a sharp sword* as going *out of his mouth*. His Word is powerful (cf. Gen. 1 for the power of the divine Word). It is with the Word and not with

armies that he smites the *nations* (cf. Isa. 11:4). The armies play no part except as backdrop to the Word. They are a fitting retinue, but he does not depend on them. *He will rule* the nations *with an iron sceptre* (cf. 2:27; 12:5), which shows that he has absolute authority. He cannot be resisted. There is an emphatic *he* (*autos*) with both *will rule* and *treads*. He and no other does these things. The figure of treading out *the winepress of the wrath of God Almighty* (cf. Isa. 63:1ff.; for *Almighty* see the note on 1:8) points to the complete overthrow of those who resist God.

16. Now comes a fourth reference to Christ's name, this *name* being written *on his robe and on his thigh*. Charles thinks this means that 'as they thunder along, their garments stream behind them, and so on the thigh of the Leader is disclosed the name'. Others think that the name is on that part of the coat that falls over the thigh. But the Greek seems rather to mean that the name is written in two places. That on the clothing will mean that this is the name for all to see. That on the thigh is more difficult, but Psalm 45:3 speaks of the sword girded on the thigh and this may be a way of saying that the sword is the Word (vv. 13, 15, 21). *KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS* (cf. 17:14) refers to Christ in his capacity as supreme Ruler. It accords well with the preceding scenes of conquest and of power. John leaves us in no doubt as to who is supreme Lord.

ii. The overthrow of the beast and of the false prophet (19:17–21)

John devotes a small section to the final overthrow of the beast and his various helpers. They have had their little day and are now put in their rightful places.

17. John sees 'one angel' (cf. 18:21) *standing in the sun*. The position is apparently a vantage-point from which he can more easily control *the birds* to whom he cries *in a loud voice*. For *mid-air* cf. 8:13; 14:6. He calls them to *the great supper of God*, i.e. the great supper which God will provide. Or the expression may be a Semitism with the significance 'a supper great to God', i.e. a very great supper. Either way it is in sharp contrast with the marriage supper of verse 9.

18. The supper is explained. It is to be a feast on the corpses of a great host of earthlings (cf. Ezek. 39:4, 17–20). The description emphasizes universality. It starts with *kings*, and goes on to officers, heroes, horses and riders, and all men (i.e. all kinds of men, for Christ's followers are not included) *free and slave, small and great*. None is excluded. The overthrow of evil is total.

19. The battle is prepared. John sees the forces of evil drawn up in battle array for their last struggle with the good. The *beast* is at their head. With him are earth's *kings* and their *armies*. Their object is to fight against *the rider on the horse and his army*.

20. John says nothing about the battle. He proceeds immediately from the drawing up of the armies to the seizing of the beast. He may mean that there was no battle. Though the forces of evil appear mighty they are completely helpless when confronted by the Christ. So

the beast was forcibly captured (*epiasthē*), and with him *the false prophet* (see note on 16:13). He is still characterized by *the miraculous signs* by means of which he deceived those who had *the mark of the beast*. This was the significant work of the false prophet. But now neither he nor the beast has any power. Both *were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur* (mentioned again in 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8). Being cast into the lake of fire signifies utter destruction. All that the beast stood for is no more.

21. *The rest of the beast's followers were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse.* That is to say, his Word destroyed them (cf. Isa. 11:4). The picture of destruction is completed with the statement that *the birds* were sated with the *flesh* of the slain, a common piece of imagery for final disaster.¹

¹ Morris, L. (1987). *Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 20, pp. 213–222). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.