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REVELATION 19: 11 – 21

JESUS RETURNS AS WARRIOR TO BEGIN HIS FINAL CLEAN-UP

As we continue to move forward through the visions of the apostle John, we find ourselves still in the midst of one decisive and exciting event, the last event of the history of our world, God's final judgement at Jesus' return in glory.

This event has two aspects, two sides to it, which occur simultaneously. We will see the coming of the New Jerusalem, the restoration of everything, the renewed creation, the new heavens and the new earth, filled with joyful praise and worship. But we will also witness the disappearance of Babylon, the destruction of God's enemies, and the punishment of Satan, his evil henchmen and his human followers.

This started in Rev. 16:17–21, when the seventh bowl of God's wrath was poured out. What follows then, in the next chapters, is all part of this one event on this one last day.

In Rev. 17 and 18 we got a detailed report of what happens to the antichristian culture that dominates our world. It is pictured in the image of the fall and destruction of Babylon, the great city, which is also called 'the great prostitute.'

Then, in Rev. 19:1–10, the tone changes. The *Hallelujah* choirs of heaven celebrate the day of Babylon’s fall, praising God on the day of his victory. We heard about the coming wedding of the Lamb Jesus Christ, with his glorious bride, the church. We heard about the invitations for the wedding supper of the Lamb. That is fantastic!

However, with the destruction of Babylon the clean-up is not complete yet. Evil must be destroyed entirely. The end of Satan’s rule is absolutely necessary to make room for the New Jerusalem. Jesus’ final clean-up is one action, but John describes it in three stages: the destruction of the two beasts, the destruction of Satan himself, and the destruction of Death and Hades. The expression that links these three steps together as one act, is “the fiery lake of burning sulphur”. That is where they will all end up, when the clean-up is done. We focus now on the first of these three stages.

THE GLORY OF JESUS’ APPEARANCE

You may remember that in Rev. 4:1 John saw *a door standing open in heaven*. The apostle was then invited to come up and come in, to have a peek in what turned out to be God’s throne room, the heart of the operational centre of the One who rules the world.

This was the start of a fascinating series of visions that gives us the view from above, from heaven, to help us understand what is going on here, in our world.

In this vision (Rev. 19:11-21) we are not following John through a door to see what is going on in heaven. No, the apostle John sees *heaven open*. Indeed, on the day of Christ’s return heaven itself will open wide. Then the whole human world, everyone on earth, will be able to see, not what is going on *in* heaven, but what is coming *out* of heaven, out of God’s centre of operations. And that is impressive.

What appears before John’s surprised look is a horse, *a white horse*, and on it a rider who will turn out to be a fierce and powerful warrior.

And this rider is not alone, with his horse. There are more. In v.14 we read that *the armies of heaven were following him*. Behind him comes a massive

stream of men on horseback, all coming out of the wide-open space of heaven, a huge army and all on white horses.

This must have been incredibly dramatic to behold. Try to imagine that. Do you remember the ‘Lord of the Rings’ movies? The wizard Gandalf rides a magnificent white horse, called Shadowfax. In one of the big battles, the evil forces of darkness are closing in on the good powers and are winning. The situation looks hopeless. And then, when it is getting frighteningly dark, a huge army of horsemen appears, coming down the mountainside, led by Gandalf the White on his white horse, who is standing out brightly against the dark surroundings. It is an impressive moment.

Here in John’s vision the white horse symbolizes that God’s victory conquers all the evil powers of darkness. The history of our world is full of wars and battles. But the great war behind all hostilities, the war that determines the course of our history, that is the ongoing battle between God and Satan, and that war is also raging in our own lives.

Well, the appearance of this glorious warrior means that the end of this battle is certain and coming soon.

This must have been such a powerful ‘wow-moment’ for the apostle John. Yes! There can be no doubt. This is the day. What John is seeing, and what we are allowed to see, through his eyes, is the returning Jesus Christ, ready to complete his work of salvation. And this includes the destruction of his enemies.

That is why the first thing we see of Jesus when he returns in brilliant glory, is that he comes as an awesome warrior, a fearless fighter. He enters this world for the final judgment, ready to fight the final battle in a just war for a just cause.

Several things stand out when John describes him here as a mighty warrior, things that make us stand in awe. I mean, what do you expect to see when Jesus comes back? Have you ever thought of that? Yes, it is a vision, and the description is loaded with symbolism. And yet – the marvellous glory of his appearance is so encouraging. Who can withstand our coming Saviour?

His eyes are like a flame of fire. This is a feature of the exalted Christ we have seen before. Remember how John saw him in Rev.1 as *someone like a son of*

man...., with eyes like a flame of fire. His penetrating gaze goes everywhere. It reaches beyond the surface of things in this world. He sees the evil intentions of the Beast, the antichristian powers. He exposes the lies and deceptions of the false prophet, the antichristian views and ideas that distort the truth of God's Word. And he will deal with it!

For him nothing in the whole world remains hidden. And that is also true for everything in the heart of each one of us. For him, each one of us is an open book. He sees and judges what lives here. And he is not fooled by what may look and sound good in our lives. He sees right through it. He knows where you are in the great war between God and Satan. He knows how easy it is for us to be taken in by the antichristian views and ideas we are bombarded with in our culture.

John also sees that on his head this rider *has many diadems* [NIV: *crowns*]. That might look weird, but the symbolism becomes clear when we know that the word used here occurs only three times in the New Testament, and all of those in Revelation. In 12:3 Satan is pictured with seven crowns, and in 13:1 the Beast out of the sea is said to have ten.

Indeed, Satan and the Beast claim to rule the world. But the One with most crowns ("many") is the only legitimate royal authority over all things. Christ alone is our unique and universal King. Do not be intimidated by the arrogant ridicule of your Christian faith and the hostile criticism that is so fashionable in our society. Jesus is coming as the all-knowing and all-seeing Ruler Supreme.

There is also a lot of emphasis on the names of this rider, names that reinforce the glory of the warrior from heaven. In the Bible someone's 'name' tells important things about a person's character or position. Here we are alerted to this three times. That makes it urgent to pay attention to these names.

Two of these names we know. In v.13 he is called "the Word of God". John has mentioned this before. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* That was in John's gospel, chapter 1:1. In other words, through Jesus we come to know God. To put it differently, through Jesus the Almighty God speaks and works. In his person and work Jesus displays the Holy God, and who he is.

Today people have lots of ideas about Jesus, and many deny or ignore his “role”, so to speak as “the Word of God”. But on the day of Christ’s return, everyone will see how true this is. Then everyone will recognize in Jesus’ appearance how true and just, how loving and merciful, how faithful and fair God is, and has always been.

The other name we know is the name we hear in v.16: “King of kings and Lord of lords”. It is also mentioned in Rev. 17:14, and it reinforces again the universal royal power that makes him invincible as he carries out the judgments of the Almighty God.

It says that this name *is written on his robe and on his thigh*. There has been some discussion whether this refers to two different locations, or to one, like, “on his robe where it covers his thigh”. But the point is that, when the glorious Christ appears, no one has to wonder who he is. Everyone can read it and knows right away.

But then there is also this mysterious name that we do not know. This Rider on his white horse *has a name written on him that no one knows but himself* (v.12). This tells us that there are also many things to know about him that are beyond our imagination. Only Christ himself can fully grasp the height and the depth, the magnitude of his own power and glory. We can only stand in awe and praise him.

There is another remarkable detail in the appearance of this impressive horseman. It says (v.13) that *he is clothed in a robe dipped in blood*. Some scholars suggest that this blood is his own blood, the blood that was shed when Jesus died on the cross for our salvation. But this vision is not about the redemption of believers. It is about the destruction of God’s enemies. In v.15 John says that the mighty warrior Christ *treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty*.

You may remember this from Rev. 14:20, about the grape-harvest being trampled in the winepress of God’s wrath, and blood flowing out of the press. And that picture echoes what we find in Isaiah 63. The bloodstains on his garment show the destructive power of Christ’s decisive victory on the day of his return.

So, look at the picture of this mighty warrior. See the great glory of his appearance. Here he is, coming out of heaven, your Saviour, your Lord and King. We know that when Jesus returns, he will usher in the new heaven and the new earth. He will bring new life and new joy, life and joy that will never end. And his power guarantees that nothing will stand in the way of his glory. He is faithful and true (v.11). Are you looking forward to this? Do you like to see this happening with your own eyes?

At the same time, it is also a frightening picture. Before this never-ending joy will be reality, the final clean-up of this world must be completed. And the Lord will do so. Look again at the glorious and awesome appearance of this warrior. He is ready for war. He is ready for the final battle against God's enemies. Are you looking forward to this as well? Do you like to see this happening with your own eyes?

But how is he going to do this? What is going to be his weapon of mass destruction? Remote controlled cruise-missiles with nuclear warheads? No, a sharp sword. And not a regular sword. It is a sword that comes out of his mouth (v.15 and 21). This is again a prop that reminds us of the picture of the exalted Christ in Rev. 1. This unusual sword is symbolic, of course. But what does it stand for?

This sharp sword is the message of God's Word. You will find this metaphor a few times in the New Testament. Now, when we talk about the message of God's Word, we look for a message of hope, encouragement, and comfort. But not here! Remember, we are talking war. This sword is used *to strike down the nations, and rule them with a rod of iron*. We heard the same about the male child in Rev. 12:5. He appears here as the anointed King who fulfills Psalm 2 by destroying all who rebel against him.

But it will not be an ordinary battle with traditional weapons. When the end comes, the warrior Jesus Christ will win his victory only by the power of God's Word. At that time, the truth of the gospel will expose the falsehoods and lies of God's enemies. And that confrontation will make them crumble and disappear.

In fact, on the day of Jesus' return everyone, followers and enemies alike, will acknowledge that the battle was won already when Jesus died on the cross and arose from the dead. With this testimony of God's Word Jesus

alone wins God's victory. He carries out God's punishment all by himself. That is his glory.

This is reinforced when we have a close look at the heavenly armies that accompany him on his mission (v.14). It is an impressive sight to behold, these massive forces riding on white horses, and dressed in fine linen. But it is an unusual army. They have no weapons! And they do not have bloodstains on their white garments.

Who are they, this militia from heaven? Angels? Probably. A few times we hear Jesus talk about "the Son of Man coming in his glory, and all the angels with him". But they may not be the only ones. The believers who died before Jesus' return are probably also part of this. Their clothing is like the bride's dress (Rev. 19:8), and like the white robes of the multitude no one can count (Rev. 7:9). And, according to Rev. 14:4, they are the ones *who follow the Lamb wherever he goes*.

But here is the point. Although they are called 'armies', they do not need to fight. They play no role in the battle. No, they are only present to enhance the glorious appearance of the warrior Jesus Christ. Indeed, on that day all the focus is on him alone. Your Saviour wins the battle singlehandedly, all on his own. *Glory to the King of angels, glory to the Church's King*. The One who died on the cross and arose from the dead does not need any help in the brutal war against sin and evil. Just remember his names. Trust his great power and stand in awe.

THE DEFEAT OF JESUS' ENEMIES

Then the picture shifts in John's vision. From our view from above we are going to have a look at the battlefield of the final battle, the battle of Armageddon, as it is called in Rev. 16:16.

But remember, it is the view from above. Oh sure, it looks frightening when the evil powers in this world unite to attack God's work and assault his people. But do not be afraid. Jesus' victory is certain. He is winning hands down!

To remind us of this, the vision shows this battle within the framework of the appalling scene of hawks, eagles, and vultures, gorging on human flesh

in v.18 and 21. This hideous symbolism builds on Old Testament imagery (Ezekiel 39:17-29). The defeat of Christ's enemies could not be demonstrated more obviously.

We first hear another loud cry by an angel. This angel is *standing in the sun*, it says. He attracts all the attention and from where he stands everyone can see him and hear his unusual invitation. He summons all the birds of prey to *the great supper of God*.

The word "supper" links this event with the other supper, we heard about in Rev. 19:9: "the marriage supper of the Lamb". However, this supper here is the absolute opposite. Yes, it will also be held under the auspices of God. But it is a gruesome caricature, a bizarre and repulsive parody of the joyful celebration of the union of the Lamb and his bride, the glorified Christ and his church.

Here the human guests will not enjoy a happy celebration. Here the human guests are on the menu! God's curse on those who rebel against him, will result in a great slaughter. The people in this world who continue to resist the Holy God and deny Jesus as Saviour will supply enough food for a horrific meal.

And do not be mistaken; v.18 shows that the list of human guests for this supper includes all segments of society: the small and the great, important people and insignificant folks. It says, "all people", which means all kinds and categories of people, regardless of your rank or social status. No one is exempt beforehand.

As a matter of fact, the only ones excluded here, are those mentioned in v.9, *the guests who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb*. So, here is what is coming: you and I and everyone else, we are all invited for supper. And it is going to be either one of these two suppers. But here is the difference you need to be aware of: either you eat or you will be eaten.

Next we see through John's eyes the enemies of God and Jesus Christ, the enemies of the church, join forces and line up for battle. They are led by two commanders, the beast and the false prophet. You may remember these monsters from other chapters and especially from Rev. 13 where we met

them for the first time as “the beast out of the sea” and “the beast out of the earth”.

The first one stands for the political powers of antichristian persecution. The second one is the propaganda chief of the first one, and stands for the anti-christian religious, cultural, ideological, and philosophical powers that want to lure you away from trusting God and his Word. They want to impress you and promise you a good life without worshipping God; v.20 sums up the evil these gang-leaders are guilty of.

Well then, this whole world of unbelief and hatred towards the true God is coming together to attack the faithful church of Jesus Christ. And by doing so, they *make war against the rider on the horse and his army*.

However, here is the surprise, on the day that the divine warrior on his white horse appears, with his heavenly armies, we do not hear anything about a fight, not even about minor skirmishes, let alone a real battle! When facing the glory of the returning Christ, the massive concentration of enemy power simply shrivels up!

It is already over, even before it starts. The planned battle immediately becomes an execution, something we will see again in the account of the same confrontation in Rev. 20:8, 9. And this is possible, because the outcome of this battle has been decided already by the warrior with the blood-stained garment. This outcome is evidence of Jesus’ victory achieved on the cross and manifest in his resurrection. Nothing can injure or damage the glory of the King.

The battle of Armageddon turns out not to be a long struggle, not even a real battle. It is a step in Jesus’ final clean-up operation. By his presence alone Jesus Christ defeats his enemies, with his un-armed armies as glorious backdrop. As Paul puts it in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, *The Lord Jesus will overthrow his adversary with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendour of his coming* [NIV].

Recognize the superior power by which your glorified Saviour makes room for the renewal of this ruined world. He comes to put everything into its proper place, the place where it belongs. For the enemies of God and of Jesus Christ this place is *the lake of fire that burns with sulphur*. This is the place of

God's permanent, God's definitive punishment. It is a horrible place, more horrible than you and I can ever imagine!

As the first step of Jesus' final clean-up, the two enemies that are mentioned here (v.20), the beast and the false prophet, are captured and thrown alive into this "lake of fire". This is the final abode of all evil. In Revelation it is also called "the second death" (Rev. 20:14; 21:8). This is "hell". And they end up there "alive", it says. They will experience God's unrestrained wrath, permanently. Terror beyond description.

In the next passages we will find that this "lake of fire" is also the destination of Satan (20:10), of Death and Hades (20:14), and of all whose names are not written in the book of life (20:15). And they will follow shortly, all on the same day of Jesus' return because the history of this world cannot be concluded before all evil has been utterly destroyed, never to come back again.

The rest of them were slain by the sword that came out of the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse. All who have remained loyal to those evil gang-leaders, stuck with them, until the bitter end, in fierce hatred towards God, and towards Jesus Christ as King, will find their horrible end by means of the sword of the glorious warrior.

The victory of the Returning King will leave the wicked dead for ever and ever. The bodies of the casualties are not buried, but they end up being just carrion for the vultures, who will gorge themselves on their flesh. This is a deeply humiliating end. It demonstrates how thorough, how drastic, how complete the victory of Christ is.

The whole scene is graphically described in terms of the great supper as announced by the angel in v.17, 18. Try to imagine the scenario. The battlefield, littered with dead bodies, numerous corpses everywhere, and then the huge flocks of birds-of-prey soaring above the carnage, and slowly coming down, the scavengers summoned by God himself, eager to feast on the human carcasses.

It's a grisly and sinister picture, and some of you might think, "You don't have to give such a graphic and detailed description. We do not need to hear those gruesome specifics."

And I agree, it is not a pretty picture. But, yes, we do need to hear this. We do need to be aware. We do need to realize what the horrendous consequences are when we choose to follow and worship the beast, when we go for the deceptions and believe the lies of the false prophet.

When we do not distance ourselves from everything that leads us away from the truth of the gospel and so from our only hope and comfort in Jesus Christ, there is a price to pay, a humiliating and disastrous price.

It is true, what happens to the hostile armies that join in rebellion against the Holy God, does not make for a pretty picture. But it is also a picture that makes clear that the victory of the Returning Christ is beyond dispute.

And this is what you and I must know today. The evil powers are not going to make it. They do not have a chance when the warrior Jesus begins his final clean-up.

So here is your question: Are you ready for supper?

And if so, which supper would you prefer to attend?

Do you want to eat?

Or do you want to be eaten?

selves and about our perception of the biblical testimony to the character of God?

3. According to v.8 the Bride's wedding dress is made of 'fine linen,' described as 'the righteous deeds of the saints.' At the same time it says that this dress is given to her. How does this help you understand what Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-13?
4. What difference does it make for your daily life if you either do, or do not believe in heaven or in a life after this earthly life?

Chapter 28 – Revelation 19:11-21

1. The Rider on the white horse is Christ and he is called "the Word of God". How does this help you to understand John 1:1-5 and 14?
2. Christ, the rider on the white horse, is called "The Word of God" and has a sharp sword coming out of his mouth. How does Hebrews 4:12 help you to understand what this part of the vision tells us about how Christ operates?
3. We like to stress how important it is to have a personal relationship with Jesus, who is full of compassion. We teach our children to love Jesus, because he loves them. We sing 'what a friend we have in Jesus'. Here we meet Jesus as a fierce warrior in a robe, stained with the blood of his enemies, master of the horrifying scene in v.21. What does that do to your relationship with him?
4. In Rev. 19 and 20 we read four times about "the lake of fire" (and sulphur). What is this lake of fire? Should we think of it as a literal fire? What are other images that the Bible uses to describe this place?

Chapter 29 – Revelation 20:1-10

1. Few parts of Scripture have been so hotly debated as what we read in Rev. 20 about the 1000 years that Satan is bound and that Christ reigns, joined by the souls of believers who have died. Many evangelical Christians in North America hold to the premillennial or postmillennial view of these events. Explain these views and discuss what the implications are for our expectations of the end time?