

20. Four-fold Hallelujah and the Rider on the White Horse (Revelation 19)

Chapter 19 has three parts: a four-fold hallelujah, the arrival of the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and the victory over the armies of the beast and false prophet. This chapter is the climatic chapter of the Revelation. Victory upon victory follow for the King and Lord of all. God destroys the minions of evil and glorifies the Lamb and his bride, the church.

Four-fold Hallelujah (Revelation 19: 1-10)

At the condemnation of the prostitute, John hears the great multitude in heaven shouting a fourfold hallelujah. The word, *hallelujah*, means, "Praise ye the Lord." The *h* is pronounced. It is sometimes a short song of praise or thanksgiving as is so used here.

The first hallelujah

1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

2 for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

A great multitude celebrates the victory over the great prostitute, Babylon. The overcoming and destruction of the great prostitute show that salvation, glory and power belong to God. The prostitute got exactly what she deserved; God's judgments are true and just. Through her adulteries, she had corrupted the earth and led man into spiritual death. Now God has avenged the blood of his servants. Paul described the matter in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10:

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

The second hallelujah

3 And again they shouted:

"Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

When they again shouted, "Hallelujah," her smoke went up forever and ever. The duration of the prostitute's judgment is so pronounced. Literally, forever and ever is into the ages of the ages and indicates no end to her punishment. The destruction rendered by God has no relief

from a certain end. The devil, the beast, and the false prophet also receive this torment without end in Revelation 20:10: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

The third hallelujah

4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

"Amen, Hallelujah!"

5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

*"Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
both small and great!"*

The elders and the four living creatures join in the worship. At this point, there is a response from the throne (perhaps the Lord, himself). All God's servants, great and small, are to fear him. The first hallelujah dealt with the duration of God's punishment; this hallelujah deals with the all-inclusive nature of those who worship him.

The fourth hallelujah

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

*"Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
7 Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."*

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

John hears the sound like the roar of rushing waters and loud peals of thunder. Here, John heard, "What sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder." This is the fifth time John has heard this overwhelming sound. In each case the sound is from the throne (4:5; 16:18), the temple (11:19), and in response to the censer from the altar being poured out (8:5). The shouting that John heard has the force, power, and majesty of heaven and the throne of God.

This hallelujah announces that the wedding of the lamb to his bride has come. The contrast is clearly to the destruction of the great prostitute of the first hallelujah. Preparations are over; the bride has made herself ready. She, the church, the heavenly city, receives fine linen to wear. Since fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints, the saints adorn the bride. The saints give their lives to this adornment.

This is the first time that the word, *bride*, appears, used in this manner, to designate the marriage between Christ and the church. Now with the wedding announced, the idea of the bride becomes a central theme of the closing chapters beginning in Revelation 21:1-2: "2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." John sees the bride in Revelation 21:9-10: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." By the time that the Revelation closes in the last verse, the bride joins equally with the Spirit to call people to the Lamb: "7 The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" Revelation 22:17. Paul concurs with John in this matter in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him."

The bride adorned with the righteous acts of the saints describes the necessity of the sufferings, trials, and perseverance of the saints. Their righteous lives make the wedding to the Lamb of God possible. Through hardship and travail, the righteous stand firm. From their baptism to the grave, the saints of God put on Christ, through baptism initially, and through their righteous works as they live as Christians. Paul described the first act in Galatians 3:26-28: "26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." The Lamb's message to the churches was that they were to so dress. In Revelation 3:4, John recorded, "4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy." The analogy also appears in Revelation 3:17-18, "18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see." The Lamb had warned the church to keep their clothes with them in Revelation 16:15, "15 Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

John Directed by the Angel

9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The angel of verse 9 appears to be the angel of 17:1, who was one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of God's wrath and invited John to see the punishment of the great prostitute. The only other angel in context is the angel of 18:1, who apparently was an angel of a special class—having great authority, illuminating the earth by his splendor, and having a mighty voice. The angel, in this context, instructs John. God blesses those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb:

Makarios is used in the beatitudes in Matthew 5 and Luke 6, is especially frequent in the Gospel of Luke, and is found seven times in Revelation, 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14. It is said of God twice, 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15. In the beatitudes, the Lord indicates not only the characters that are "blessed," but the nature of that which is the highest good. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

The notes on Revelation 1 spoke about how the word, *blessed*, marks the single overarching theme of the Book of Revelation. The development of that theme reaches its climax with the wedding of the bride and the Lamb of God. The passages bear repeating in this present context:

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Revelation 1:3: 3.

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Revelation 14:13.

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Revelation 16:15.

Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." Revelation 19:9.

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6.

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." Revelation 22:7.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14.

Even in the parables, Jesus had taught the importance of the coming of the bridegroom and the need to be prepared (See Matthew 9:15 and 25:6-10). The beauty, celebration, and glory of wedding supper of the Lamb are in direct contrast to the fate of the great prostitute, Babylon: "The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again." Revelation 18:23.

These are the true words of God connects the joining of the bride and bridegroom to the revelation from God. In John 14:10-11, Jesus taught, "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." He later included in his prayer the relationship of the word of God and the truth, "17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." John 17:17. At this point in the revelation, John is getting to the "heart of the matter."

So taken was he by the events, John fell down to worship the angel. However, the angel describes himself as a fellow servant of God with John and all those who hold to the testimony of Jesus. The angel's simple command, "Worship God!" is so plain, so emphatic, that one cannot miss the point of to whom we owe allegiance, homage, awe, and reverence. Not the angels in heaven, not religious clerics, not temples made with hands, not relics or statues, or any such persons or things. Worship God!

The angel states what appears to be an eternal principle: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The New Testament is replete with this connection between our testimony and God's prophecy through the apostles and prophets. Three examples will suffice. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:11, "11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God." Jude wrote of contending for the faith entrusted to the saints in Jude 3-4, "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the

saints." It is this spirit of prophecy and our testimony of it that perfects the church. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-13:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

A Majestic Christ Appears (Revelation 19:11-21)

This part of chapter 19 picks up where events paused in Revelation 16:12-16 where John learned that the beast and the false prophet gathered the kings of the whole world together for battle on the great day of God Almighty. The pause in the events of the great battle allowed the angel to show John the fate of the great prostitute, the great city Babylon. With the fate of the prostitute concluded with the four-fold hallelujahs, the narrative returns to the great battle and the final disposition of the beast and the false prophet.

19: 11-16: 11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

John sees heaven standing open. These very first words of this episode establish the place of the battle as in heaven, making it wholly and totally a spiritual battle. Not only is the place of impending battle in heaven, but the armies of the Lord are also the armies of heaven (19:14). Plain and true, the battle of Armageddon (16:16) is a spiritual battle setting the beast, the false prophet, and kings of the whole world (16:12-14 and 19:19-21) against the church the bride of Christ. There is no evidence that Armageddon is a physical battle on this earth. The evidence is to the contrary, the rider on the white horse is already KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The rider of the horse is called Faithful and True. In the letter of the church of Laodicea, Jesus called himself faithful and true. John recorded in Revelation 3:14, "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Once again, the text is certain. The Lord is now the ruler of God's creation. There will be no future kingdoms on this earth. He is *now* KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And we are *now* a kingdom and priests with him: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Revelation 1:5-6.

The purpose of the Lord is to judge and make war. His description here is similar to the one in the first chapter: eyes like blazing fire, many crowns upon his head, and dressed in a robe dipped in blood. On the one hand, he has a name written on him that no one knows but himself; on the other hand, his name is the word of God. This name, the word of God, is

reminiscent of John 1:1. John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning."

The armies of heaven were following him; they too are riding white horses. The phrase, *they are dressed in fine linen, white and clean*, shows that the army of heaven is clothed with the righteous acts of the saints as in Revelation 19:8: "(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" The dress is figurative of the righteousness of the saints, during this spiritual war. This spiritual army, so amassed, is the army spoken by Paul in Ephesians 6:10-13:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Everyday, Christians fight the spiritual war against the beast and the false prophet. Indeed, even the armor of this warfare is spiritual armor.

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:14-17.

In this passage by Paul, the weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. In John's vision the Lamb is so equipped also, "15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations." Christ gave the same the description of himself in Revelation 1:16, "16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword." In the letter to the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2:12, the sword is sharp, double-edged. In the same passage the Lord tells how he will use the sword, "16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Revelation 2: 16. The writer of the Hebrew letter describes the full nature of the sword as the word of God, "12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." Hebrews 4:12-13.

In summary, the war is in heaven, the armies of the Lord are spiritual armies of heaven, and the sword is a spiritual sword, the word of God. The Lord himself is the Word of God. There is no room in this passage for the sectarian materialism, which calls for a physical, material war in this present, material earth. The battle of Armageddon is a spiritual battle fought between the armies of heaven and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

The phrase, *he will rule them with an iron scepter*, is from a prophecy in the second Psalm, verse 9. In the letter to the church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:26-27), the Lord quoted the prophecy and applied it to himself and to his followers, "26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – /27'He will rule them with an iron scepter,/he will dash them to pieces like pottery." In Revelation 12:5, the phrase specifically describes the Christ child, "5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." Thus, the Lord of this context is a reigning Lord. He has written on his robe, dripped in blood, and on his thigh, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORD'S. He is the one

who treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. The reference here to the winepress connects us once again to the harvest of the earth of Revelation 14:19-20, "19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia." The end of the harvest is the end of flesh and all things worldly in verses 17-18.

The End of Flesh (Revelation 19: 17-18)

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."

With the harvest of the last day, flesh and blood will be no more. God's wrath is upon all flesh, small and great, mighty and weak, free and slave. The events that follow will bring a just end to flesh and fleshly matters. The beast and false prophet, the dragon, and all those whose name is not written in the Book of Life receive their righteous judgment.

The Fate of the Beast and the False Prophet (Revelation 19: 19-21)

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Suddenly the war is over for the kings, the beast, the false prophet, and the rest of them. Only the dragon remains, however, his fate, too, is sealed. From Eden to the flood, from Babel to the cross, from the cross to this great day of God Almighty, the battle waged across time is over. The sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse has slain the enemy. Those who stood for the testimony of Jesus—clothed in the linen of their righteous acts—and the Word of God are victorious. In just three verses, the Lord defeats the beast and the false prophet. They are thrown alive in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Flesh is no more, but the punishment is forever.