



Revelation - Chapter Nineteen

VII Revelation 17:1-19:10 - Babylon the prostitute (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Nineteen

This chapter begins with the marriage of the Lamb to his bride, the church who has made herself ready and was clothed in fine linen, representing the righteous deeds of the saints. After the marriage, John saw heaven open and then saw a white horse with its rider who was called Faithful and True, i.e. Christ, who comes in righteousness to judge and make war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and his robe is dipped in blood. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron. Following him were the armies of heaven, also on white horses.

Then an angel called to all the birds flying overhead to come and gather to eat the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, small and great. Then the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies came together to war against Christ and his army. The first and second beast were captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire. Those left were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse.

VII.c Revelation 19:1-10 - The Rejoicing in Heaven

The scene now turns to one of great celebration in heaven with the Hallelujah Chorus, which probably inspired Handel's Messiah, announcing that God's victory has been achieved and that it is now time for the long awaited marriage of the Lamb to his bride, the church.

¹ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

‘Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power to our God,

² for his judgements are true and just;
he has judged the great whore
who corrupted the earth with her fornication,
and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’

Revelation 19:1-2

John had seen a great multitude, representing every nation, standing before God’s throne in heaven and extolling his salvation (7:9-10). Now that countless choir, redeemed by the Lamb (7:14), praises God also for his just vengeance on the prostitute who murdered the saints. This is the response to the command to: *<<Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets! For God has given judgement for you against her>>* (Revelation 18:20).

Hallelujah, which occurs only in vv.1-6 in the NT, comes from a Hebrew term for ‘praise Yahweh’, but is used often in the Psalms, especially Psalms 113-118, also known as the Hallel Psalms.

True and just. God’s judgments will expose every lie and right every wrong (15:3 and 16:7).

As in 18:23-24, the great whore is condemned for twin crimes: she corrupted the earth (11:18) through beguiling pleasure, and she shed the blood of God’s servants (17:6), which he has finally avenged: *<<they cried out with a loud voice, ‘Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’>>* (Revelation 6:10).

³ Once more they said,
‘Hallelujah!
The smoke goes up from her for ever and ever.’

Revelation 19:3

Once more they said. The great multitude in heaven continues with their rejoicing as commanded.

Babylon’s smoke goes up from her for ever and ever, symbolising irreversible judgment, like the millstone thrown into the sea (18:21), and the vision of the prophet: *<<Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it for ever and ever>>* (Isaiah 34:10).

The heavenly praise of God, Hallelujah!, for this judgment can be understood only in light of the pervasive evil of the great whore, and the infinite worthiness of the God whom she repeatedly blasphemed.

⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who is seated on the throne, saying,

‘Amen. Hallelujah!’

Revelation 19:4

The celebration continues with the worship of God on his throne also offered by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, linking this consummation celebration with the earlier vision of God and the Lamb (5:8-10).

Amen, the English transliteration of the Greek word *amēn*, which was itself taken from a word with the same sound in Hebrew, ‘*amen*’, expresses confident certainty: <<*So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep’>> (John 10:7), or strong agreement: <<Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying?>> (1 Corinthians 14:16).*

⁵ And from the throne came a voice saying,

‘Praise our God,
all you his servants,
and all who fear him,
small and great.’

Revelation 19:5

A voice from the throne transposes the Hebrew expression Hallelujah into the Greek language of John’s hearers, with the command: Praise our God. It is God who is seated on the throne (v.4), so this is probably a command from one of his attendants standing by the throne.

Just as God’s servants include both small and great, so also, sadly, does the army that follows the beast (v.18). Since the voice differentiates between servants and all who fear him, this may be a call to repentance for those who had not yet pledged their allegiance to God, or it could be differentiation between those in heaven and those on earth who serve God.

John seems to be drawing on the sentiments of the psalmists in this verse: <<*The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great>> (Psalm 115:12-13), and: <<Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the Lord>> (Psalm 134:1-2).*

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, 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 to her it has been granted to be clothed

with fine linen, bright and pure’ –

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

Revelation 19:6-8

The next voice is like that of a great multitude, many waters, and mighty thunder-peals, and it comes from a great worshiping multitude in heaven (14:2).

The Almighty reigns throughout history, but here, as in 11:15-17, he is praised for establishing his reign without rival or resistance at Christ’s return: <<*Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power*>> (1 Corinthians 15:24).

With the prostitute destroyed, the Lamb’s pure bride is announced, clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, contrasting with the purple and scarlet of the beast’s woman. Babylon and her doom have gradually faded from the vision of rejoicing John sees in this chapter. She is never mentioned after v.3. Rejoicing over Babylon gives way to rejoicing over the establishment of God’s rule, and specifically over the marriage of the Lamb.

It has been granted. Her gown of righteous deeds is her groom’s gift of grace: <<*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels*>> (Isaiah 61:10), <<*They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow-servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed*>> (Revelation 6:11), and: <<*I said to him, ‘Sir, you are the one that knows.’ Then he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’*>> (Revelation 7:14). On the church as the bride of Christ, refer to 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 21:2, 21:9 and 22:17.

At this point an interpretation is given. This identifies not only the fine linen but also the woman who wears it. If the bride’s fine linen stands for the righteous deeds of the saints, then the bride herself represents the saints, the people of God whose blood has been avenged and who have joined in the chorus of rejoicing.

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 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 comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'

Revelation 19:9-10

And the angel said to me, 'Write this'. This is probably a resumption of the interpretation of the angel that was last noted in 17:18. He wanted to ensure that John wrote down these words for they mark one of the most important events in all of history.

Blessed. This is Revelation's fourth of seven benedictions. Refer to the comments made on 1:3 and the supplementary material on the web site.

Those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are believers who belong to his beloved bride, the church, who have been called through the Gospel of grace. Refer also to Isaiah 25:6-9 and Luke 14:15-24.

This marriage supper of the Lamb was anticipated in the predictions of a messianic banquet in Matthew 22:1-14, 25:10 and 26:29.

These are true words of God. All of God's words are of course true but the angel says this for emphasis. Impressed by the fulfilment of the words of God, John fell at the angel's feet to worship him. John is twice reprimanded: You must not do that!; the other occurrence is recorded in Revelation 22:8-9. Instead, John is commanded to worship God alone, in dramatic confirmation of the deity of Jesus, the Lamb who is rightly worshiped (5:8-14). The wording of this admonishment is very strong, for although angels are mighty, worshipping them or anyone else who is not God is false worship.

I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. The angel makes it quite clear why he is not to be worshipped for he serves God just as all humans are called to do. The church must be very clear on who it is they worship and to avoid worshipping great characters from the past; even the family and apostles of Jesus are to be treated only as fellow servants.

In telling the story, John does not hesitate to make himself a negative example. He is as ignorant as Cornelius was when he fell down to worship Peter and was told: <<*Stand up; I am only a mortal*>> (Acts 10:26b). John's angel, who obviously cannot claim to be a mere mortal, reminds John instead that they share a common position as servants of God and custodians of the testimony of Jesus, and God's servants do not worship each other. The Godhead alone is worthy of their worship.

The angel offers one last interpretation: For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The form of the pronouncement matches exactly that of the interpretation given in v.8, which literally states: 'for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints'. The apparent meaning is that those who have the

testimony of Jesus, i.e. the angel, John and John's brothers, are all prophets. Prophets are bearers of the Word of God, and in this book 'the Word of God' and 'the testimony of Jesus' are inseparable.

VIII. Revelation 19:11-20:15 - The defeat and destruction of the beasts, the dragon, and death

An opening of heaven introduces a vision sequence that signifies the last battle between Christ and the forces of evil, resulting in their defeat and destruction. This passage shows the fulfilment of the single greatest promise of history: the return of Christ to reign on earth.

VIII.a Revelation 19:11-16 - The Rider on the White Horse

The Risen Christ now appears riding a white horse and is described in all his splendour as he leads out his people to wage one final battle against the beast and his armies.

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

Revelation 19:11

Then I saw heaven opened. In the previous chapter and a half, John's experience has been mainly auditory rather than visual. He is once again shown visions.

It seems most likely that heaven exists in a different dimension to that occupied by those of us who dwell on earth. In this way heaven can be opened to allow a view from one dimension to another and to allow spiritual beings to pass between the two. This is seen in other passages, such as: <<*And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him*>> (Matthew 3:16), and: <<*When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'*>> (Acts 7:54-56).

The rider of the white horse is already victorious, and white is the colour of victory; refer to the comment on 2:17. The rider's title, Faithful and True, identifies him as Jesus, the faithful and true witness (1:5 and 3:14).

In righteousness he judges and makes war because all authority to do so has been given to him by the Father: <<*And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'*>> (Matthew 28:18). This is also reminiscent of what was foretold by the prophet: <<*His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked*>> (Isaiah 11:3-4).

¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself.

Revelation 19:12

The horse's rider, already identified as the Son of Man, has eyes like a flame of fire, as John had seen him in his initial vision (1:14b). His many diadems, crowns signifying royalty, show his supremacy as King of kings and Lord of lords (v.16), as also related before in 17:14, and The Word of God (v.13). These titles seem to be in addition the other name inscribed that no one knows but himself, since the infinite being of the Son of God can never be fully known. Divine mystery veils part of the nature of the Son in whom God speaks most fully: <<*All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*>> (Luke 10:22).

¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God.

Revelation 19:13

For the reason why he is clothed in a robe dipped in blood refer to the comments made on vv.15-16.

His name refers to all that is true about him, and therefore the totality of his person. It is about accepting him according to the revelation of who he is by his name. It is a name that commands praise and worship: <<*Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven*>> (Psalm 148:3), and: <<*Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*>> (Philippians 2:9-11).

He is named The Word of God as the greatest revelation of the Father: <<*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*>> (John 1:1), <<*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14), and: <<*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds*>> (Hebrews 1:1-2).

¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

Revelation 19:14

Fine linen, white and pure, identifies the armies of heaven as the bride of the Lamb (6:11 and 7:14). They follow him on white horses, sharing in his victory; refer to the comment on 2:17.

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 wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.

Revelation 19:15-16

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations is a reference to God's Word, which searches hearts and judges rebels and is the tool of divine judgement. It can be used as a metaphor for the word spoken by a prophet: <<*He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away*>> (Isaiah 49:20); the equipping of disciples: <<*Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*>> (Ephesians 6:17); the Gospel message: <<*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*>> (Hebrews 4:12); and the primary weapon of Christ: <<*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming*>> (2 Thessalonians 2:8), and: <<*In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force*>> (Revelation 1:16).

Jesus is the Messiah who will rule the nations with a rod of iron as foretold by King David: <<*You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*>> (Psalm 2:9), judging justly and striking down the wicked. Refer also to the comment on 12:5.

As the Divine Warrior who treads the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty, his robe is dipped in his foes' blood: <<'Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?' 'It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save.' 'Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?' 'I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come. I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me. I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth'>> (Isaiah 63:1-6).

Once again, it is made quite clear that this is the Risen Christ who is riding to final victory for on his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.

VIII.b Revelation 19:17-21 - The Beast and Its Armies Defeated

This foretells one of the two great banquets served in heaven. In this case the fare is the flesh of the defeated armies that come up against the Son of Man. The beast and the false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire, while their followers will be killed by the Lamb. Their carcasses will be eaten by the birds of the air.

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders – flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great.’

Revelation 19:17-18

That John saw an angel standing in the sun places the angel far above the earth’s atmosphere, or mid-heaven, in which the birds fly. The angel’s invitation for birds to pick corpses clean at the great supper of God reflects an OT covenant curse: <<*Your corpses shall be food for every bird of the air and animal of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away*>> (Deuteronomy 28:26), and echoes God’s prophetic word against Gog and Magog, who oppressed his people: <<*As for you, mortal, thus says the Lord God: Speak to the birds of every kind and to all the wild animals: Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth – of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. You shall eat fat until you are filled, and drink blood until you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you. And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with warriors and all kinds of soldiers, says the Lord God*>> (Ezekiel 39:17-20); refer also to 20:8.

This is the ghastly counterpart to the joyful wedding supper of the Lamb (v.9). It anticipates the end of battle, when the ground is strewn with corpses, and the birds of prey claim their due. Already it is clear that the corpses are not those of the armies accompanying the rider on the white horse, but the armies arrayed against him. If the rider on the white horse evoked for John and his readers the traditional expectation of Jesus’ return to earth as Son of Man, it is natural to wonder if perhaps this scene is intended to echo in some way the strange saying of Jesus in that connection: <<*Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather*>> (Luke 17:37b).

The beast’s army, to be consumed as carrion, includes not only kings and warriors, but also all who serve the beast, both free and slave, both small and great (13:16).

¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army.

Revelation 19:19

John makes it known that the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies are allied in their fight against God and against his anointed, i.e. the rider on the horse and against his army.

Gathered to make war is literally, to make the battle, Greek *ton polemon*, probably referring back to the 'battle on the great day of God the Almighty' (16:14). Assembled (16:14) and gathered here translate Greek *synagō*.

²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.

Revelation 19:20

As in 12:5-8, the forces of evil cannot resist Christ's power. The beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur: <<I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire>> (Daniel 7:11), whereas their followers suffer physical death (v.21). However, this is not annihilation but spiritual death and torment that will go on for all eternity.

The beast and the false prophet, like the great prostitute, represent not merely individuals but corrupt human institutions.

²¹ And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Revelation 19:21

The rest will be <<the kings of the earth with their armies>> (v.19), including all categories of people (v.18). They were killed by Jesus, the rider on the horse, with the Word of God they had so wilfully ignored, that is, with the sword that came from his mouth. Their mortal end is to be eaten by the birds from mid-heaven: all the birds were gorged with their flesh. Only the Lamb and his army will survive this battle.

Together the visions of the birds of prey in the sky (vv.17-18) and the outcome of the so-called battle (vv.19-21) form a kind of chiasm, that is, the same three elements are repeated in reverse order:

- (a) The birds of the sky are invited to feast (v.17).
- (b) The doomed armies are described (v.18).
- (c) The beast gathers these armies for battle (v.19).

(c') The beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown into the lake of fire (v.20).

(b') The armies are killed by the sword of the rider on the white horse (v.21).

(a') The birds feast on their flesh (v.21).

The effect of the chiasm is to dramatise the inevitability of the outcome. The armies arrayed against the rider on the white horse are slaughtered by the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, that is, the Word of God. God speaks and it is done.

The angel standing in the sun (v.17) knows the end from the beginning. The beast has not been heard from since Chapter 17, where his involvement in the conflict was made unmistakably clear (17:13-14). The false prophet, mentioned only once before in passing without further identification (16:13), is here explicitly said to be the one who had performed the miraculous signs on the beast's behalf and had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image (v.20). This identifies him as the second beast 'coming out of the earth' who had enforced on the earth's inhabitants the worship of the beast from the sea (13:11-17). The false prophet played no role in the vision or the explanation by the angel in Chapter 17, yet the two beasts are to John inseparable, and they go on to their destruction in this their final scene.