



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 46

Text: Rev. 19:11-21

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ θεοῦ ἡν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς, 2 καὶ μαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ βιβλίου καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀκούσκων καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου ἡ γεγραμμένα.

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2. What the text means.

Christ Wins the Battle!

Greek NT

11 Καὶ εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἠνεωγμένον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος λευκός καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν [καλούμενος] πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, καὶ ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ. 12 οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλὸξ πυρός, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά, ἔχων ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός, 13 καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον βεβαμμένον αἵματι, καὶ κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.

14 Καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἔφ’ ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν. 15 καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, καὶ αὐτὸς ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, καὶ αὐτὸς πατεῖ τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, 16 καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον· Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων.

17 Καὶ εἶδον ἓνα ἄγγελον ἐστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ καὶ ἔκραξεν [ἐν] φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγων πᾶσιν τοῖς ὀρνέοις τοῖς πετομένοις ἐν

Gute Nachricht Bibel

11 Dann sah ich den Himmel weit geöffnet. Und ich sah ein weißes Pferd, auf dem saß einer, der heißt der Treue und Wahrhaftige. Er urteilt und kämpft gerecht. 12 Seine Augen waren wie Flammen und auf dem Kopf trug er viele Kronen. Ein Name stand auf ihm geschrieben, den nur er selbst kennt. 13 Sein Mantel war blutgetränkt, und sein Name ist »Das Wort Gottes«. 14 Die Heere des Himmels folgten ihm. Alle ritten auf weißen Pferden und waren in reines weißes Leinen gekleidet. 15 Aus seinem Mund kam ein scharfes Schwert, mit dem er die Völker besiegen sollte. Er wird sie mit eisernem Zepter regieren und sie zertreten, wie man die Trauben in der Weinpresse zertritt. So vollstreckt er den glühenden Zorn Gottes, des Herrschers der ganzen Welt. 16 Auf seinem Mantel und auf seinem Schenkel stand sein Name: »König der Könige und Herr der Herren«.

17 Dann sah ich einen Engel*, der stand in der Sonne. Er rief allen Vögeln, die hoch am Himmel flogen, mit lauter Stimme zu: »Kommt, versammelt euch für Gottes großes Festmahl! 18 Kommt und

NRSV

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. 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. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, wearing 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 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."

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, "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." 19 Then I saw the

NLT

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. And the one sitting on the horse was named Faithful and True. For he judges fairly and then goes to war. 12 His eyes were bright like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him, and only he knew what it meant. 13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven, dressed in pure white linen, followed him on white horses. 15 From his mouth came a sharp sword, and with it he struck down the nations. He ruled them with an iron rod, and he trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of almighty God. 16 On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, shouting to the vultures flying high in the sky: "Come! Gather together for the great banquet God has prepared. 18 Come and eat the flesh of kings, captains, and strong warriors; of horses and their riders; and of all humanity,

μεσουρανήματι·

Δεῦτε συνάχθητε εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ 18 ἵνα φάγητε σάρκας βασιλέων καὶ σάρκας χιλιάρχων καὶ σάρκας ἰσχυρῶν καὶ σάρκας ἵππων καὶ τῶν καθημένων ἐπ' αὐτῶν καὶ σάρκας πάντων ἐλευθέρων τε καὶ δούλων καὶ μικρῶν καὶ μεγάλων.

19 Καὶ εἶδον τὸ θηρίον καὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα αὐτῶν συνηγμένα ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον μετὰ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ. 20 καὶ ἐπίσθη τὸ θηρίον καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης ὁ ποιήσας τὰ σημεῖα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν τοὺς λαβόντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνούντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ· ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ. 21 καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου τῇ ἐξελλοούσῃ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, καὶ πάντα τὰ ὄρνεα ἐχορτάσθησαν ἐκ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτῶν.

fresst das Fleisch von Königen, Heerführern und Krieger! Fresst das Fleisch der Pferde und ihrer Reiter, das Fleisch von allen Menschen, von Sklaven und Freien, von Hohen und Niedrigen!« 19 Dann sah ich das Tier zusammen mit den Königen der Erde. Ihre Heere waren angetreten, um gegen den Reiter und sein Heer zu kämpfen. 20 Das Tier wurde gefangen genommen und auch der falsche Prophet, der unter den Augen des Tieres die Wunder getan hatte. Durch diese Wunder hatte er alle verführt, die das Zeichen des Tieres angenommen und das Standbild des Tieres angebetet hatten. Das Tier und der falsche Prophet wurden bei lebendigem Leib in einen See von brennendem Schwefel geworfen. 21 Alle Übrigen wurden durch das Schwert vernichtet, das aus dem Mund dessen kommt, der auf dem Pferd reitet. Alle Vögel wurden satt von ihrem Fleisch.

beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. 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 worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 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.

both free and slave, small and great.” 19 Then I saw the beast gathering the kings of the earth and their armies in order to fight against the one sitting on the horse and his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who did mighty miracles on behalf of the beast -- miracles that deceived all who had accepted the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue. Both the beast and his false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came out of the mouth of the one riding the white horse. And all the vultures of the sky gorged themselves on the dead bodies.

INTRODUCTION

The Downfall of Babylon

John's Narrative Strategy

Each segment points ultimately to the downfall of Babylon as a symbol of ultimate evil at the end of time. By the end of chapter 20, both she, all her leaders and supporters, along with her patron, Satan himself, are destroyed and banished to eternal damnation.



After fifteen chapters increasingly pointing to this apocalyptic event, we finally reach the point of its occurrence starting in 19:11. All of evil both human and supernatural join up in a gigantic effort to destroy the people of God and to do God harm. But in a matter of a few seconds they are wiped away totally ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ,

the eternal order which begins with the great judgment of humanity (20:11-15). The remainder of Revelation in chapters 21 and 22 then zero in on the blessings of Almighty God upon His people in the eternal order of things.

by the sword, coming out of the mouth of Him sitting on the white horse of victory before the battle even takes place. Such is the power of our God to destroy evil! Our text in 19:11-21 is the first in a series of depictions of this final battle between God and evil. Chapter twenty presents a couple more depictions with emphasis upon the doom of Satan himself. And this 'battle' signals the ushering in of

We can now rejoice in the completed deliverance from all evil by our God. Every vestige of evil, both human and supernatural, has been banished to eternal torments and damnation. Never again can evil rise up to harm or hurt us as God's redeemed people. Our life now will be lived out eternally in the full presence of the God of this universe.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

In the continuation of the apocalyptic narrative, the background elements favor the literary side rather than the historical side. Allusions to things in the historical world of John are present but play minor roles in the expression of ideas in the text.

Historical Aspects:

External History. The history of the hand copying of the manuscripts containing this passage, i.e., the Transcriptional History, reflects some variations in the wording of this passage. These variations are listed in abbreviated form in both the UBS 4th revised edition printed Greek text and the Nestle-Aland 28th rev. ed. Greek text. But the Text Apparatus of both these Greek New Testaments are different in design and purpose. The apparatus of the UBS text is limited to listings of variations which the editors felt would impact the translation of the passage into various modern languages. But the apparatus of the N-A 28th rev. ed. is more inclusive so that scholars doing intensive study of the text have an essentially full picture of all of the currently known variations in all of the now available ancient manuscripts of this passage. I include both of these for your benefit as a reader of this passage with a desire to know as much as possible about the background of the passage.

The importance of having some awareness of this comes out of fundamental principles of interpreting the Bible. The very first principle, and a foundational principle at that, of interpretation is **ESTABLISH THE TEXT**. When seeking to understand the Bible, or any piece of written literature, one must establish the exact wording of the text being studied. And this has to be in the original language in which the text was written. It can't be done from a translation of the passage into another language. Fortunately in regard to the Greek New Testament, we are blessed with hundreds upon hundreds of copies of that text in the original language of Koine Greek. The challenge is to know how to properly sift through the massive copies in determination of the most likely original reading of the text. The science of [Text Criticism](#) has developed guidelines for doing just this with certainty and confidence. We don't get into this highly technical procedure in these studies, but rather draw upon the highly skilled insights of those who work in this field of biblical studies. The end products of

these insights are reflected in both printed Greek texts, in which the adopted readings of the NT text is virtually identical between these two primary Greek NTs.

In *The Greek Testament* apparatus (UBS 4th rev ed.), three places are listed for consideration:

19:11 [καλούμενος] πιστός και ἀληθινός, [called] Faithful and True, {C}.¹ The issue here

centers on the presence or absence of the participle καλούμενος, called. The meaning of the expression is the same with or without the participle.² The evidence slightly favors the inclusion of the participle καλούμενος but it is placed in brackets, [--], to indicate uncertainty about whether to include it.

19:12 [ὡς], [as], {C}.³ The issue here is over the presence or absence of the comparative particle ὡς, as. The difference is between the text reading ὡς φλόξ πυρός, as a flame of fire, or φλόξ πυρός, flame of fire. Good external evidence supports including but a few other important manuscripts omit it.⁴ Thus ὡς is included but



¹{C} καλούμενος πιστός και ἀληθινός (κ πιστός καλούμενος) (1006 και καλούμενος) 1611 1841 1854 2030 2053 2062 (2329 omit και ἀληθινός) 2344 Byz [046] it^(ar), sig. 1 vg^{cl} syr^{ph}, h (eth) Irenaeus^{lat} Origen^{gr, lat}; Cyprian Jerome Apringius Primasius Beatus // πιστός και ἀληθινός A P 051 205 209 arm Hippolytus Andrew // vocabatur fidelis et verax vocatur vg^{ww, ts}

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

²It is possible that the shorter reading πιστός και ἀληθινός is original and that καλούμενος was added by various copyists either before or after the phrase, or after πιστός. More likely, however, καλούμενος was omitted either accidentally (καλούμενόκα) or deliberately (lest it be imagined that the Rider is merely called Faithful and True). But since καλούμενος occurs in various positions in the manuscripts, it may not be original and is therefore put in brackets to indicate uncertainty regarding the original text."

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 547.]

³{C} ὡς A 1006 1841 it^{ar}, sig. 1 vg syr^{ph}, h cop^{sa, (bo)} eth Irenaeus^{lat} Origen^{gr, lat}; Cyprian Jerome Apringius Primasius Beatus // omit κ 051 205 209 1611 1854 2030 2053 2062 2329 2344 Byz [P 046] arm Hippolytus Andrew

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁴The ὡς before φλόξ (flame) has good manuscript support. Furthermore, the use of the word is characteristic of the author of Revelation. On the other hand, ὡς is lacking in a variety of witnesses, and copyists may have added it under the influence of the sim-

also placed in brackets.

19:13, βεβαμμένον, dipped, {B}.⁵ Copyists substituted numerous alternative readings to the participle βεβαμμένον, dipped (in blood). This participle has better external manuscript support, and internally can best explain the origin of the alternative readings. Thus it is the adopted reading.⁶

The fuller listing of the apparatus in the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (N-A 28th rev ed) illustrates the wider range of variations usually in isolated manuscripts that often are late and do not count heavily for text reading adoption. This passage reflects some 28 places where variations surface.⁷



ilar expression in 1:14. Since the evidence is so evenly balanced, ὧς is put in brackets to indicate uncertainty regarding the original text. Even if the variant reading is followed, in many languages it may be best to change the metaphor ‘his eyes were flames of fire’ (so NJB) into a simile: ‘his eyes were like flames of fire’.”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 548.]

⁵{B} βεβαμμένον A 051 205 209 1854 2030 2344 Byz [046] cop^{sa} arm Andrew // ἔραμμένον (1611 ῥεραμμένον) 2053 2062 (Origen^{1/2}) // ἔρραντισμένον (P 2329 ῥερατισμένον) 1006 1841 it^{ar}, sig. 1 vg eth Irenaeus^{lat} Origen^{gr 1/2, lat} (Hippolytus); Cyprian Priscillian Jerome Varimadum Apringius Primasius Cassiodorus Beatus // περιπεραμμένον κ* (κ² περιεραντισμένον)

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁶“Among the many variant readings, βεβαμμένον appears to be the best supported and most likely to be changed. Copyists may have thought that a form of the verb ῥαίνω or ῥαντίφω (sprinkle with) was more appropriate because the noun αἷματι (in/with blood) did not have the preposition ἐν (in). Or they may have thought that the context (and perhaps also the memory of Isa 63:3) made some form of the verbs ῥαίνω or ῥαντίφω more appropriate. The original copyist of manuscript κ wrote περιπεραμμένον (dipped on all sides). The sense of the reading in the text is probably that the robe was dripping blood. But it is possible to understand that the robe, by having been dipped in blood, was red in color, as the translation in REB suggests: ‘he was robed in a garment dyed in blood’.”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 548.]

11

* 2–4 A P 051 M^A; Hippn (different sequence for καλούμενος πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός)

| 2 1 3 4 κ

| 1 2 2329

| txt 046. (1006). 1611. 1841. 1854. 2030. 2053. 2062 M^K

vg^{cl} sy; Irlat Or

12

° κ P 046. 051. 1611. 1854. 2030. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2344 M; Hipp (ὧς is omitted)

| txt A 1006. 1841 latt sy samss sy; Irlat Or
* ονοματα γεγραμμενα και 1006. 1841. 1854. 2030 M^K sy^{h**}
(after ἔχων is inserted ὀνόματα γεγραμμένα και)

13

* ρεραντισμενον P 2329. (ερραντισμενον 1006. 1841); Hipp (βεβαμμένον is replaced with alternatives)

| περιπεραμμενον κ*

| περιεραντισμενον κ2

| ερραμμενον (ρεραμμενον 1611). 2053. 2062

| txt A 046. 051. 1854. 2030. 2344 M

* καλειται 051. 2344 M^A; Ir^{lat} (alternative spelling for κέκληται)

14

° κ A 046. 1611. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2344 M^A gig txt P 051. 1006. 1841. 1854. 2030 M^K lat sa; Cyp (2nd τὰ is omitted)

* εφιπτοι πολλοι 051*. 2344 M^A (ἐφ’ ἵπτοις λευκοῖς replaced)

* ενδεδυμενοις κ*; Or (ἐνδεδυμένοι is replaced)

* λευκον βυσσινον A (βύσσινον λευκὸν is replaced)

| λευκοβυσσινον 1006. 1841

* και κ gig vgcl syph; Or Apr (και is inserted before καθαρὸν)

15

* διστομος 046. 1006. 1841. 1854. 2030. 2329 M^K vg^{cl} sy^{h**}; Ambr Prim (before ὀξεῖα is inserted δίστομος)

* 3 4 1 2 κ 2329; Or (τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς is in different sequence and/or with replacements)

| του θυμου και της οργης 2344 M^A

16

* επι το μετωπον και 1006. 1841 (τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς is either replaced or omitted)

| – A

17

* αλλον κ 2053. 2062 sy^{ph} sa^{ms} bo (ἓνα is replaced or omitted)

| – 046. 1611. 1854. 2030. 2329 M^K sy^h; Bea

| txt A P 051. 1006. 1841 M^A ar vg; Prim

° A P 051. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2344 M^A latt txt κ 046. 1854. 2030 M^K (έν is omitted)

^{o1} 051 M^A vg^{ms} (λέγων is omitted)

^{o2} 051 M^A; Prim (συνάχθητε is omitted)

* του μεγαλου 051 M^A (τὸ μέγα τοῦ is replaced)

18

* αυτους A (αὐτῶν is replaced)

| αυτοις κ

* μικρων 046. 1611. 2062 vg^{ms} (και μικρῶν is replaced)

| μικρων τε 051. 1854. 2030. 2053 M^K

* των κ 1006. 1611. 1841 (τῶν is inserted before μεγάλων)

19

* αυτου A sa (αὐτῶν is replaced)

° P 051. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2344 M^A (τὸν is omitted)

20

* ο μετ αυτου 046. 1006. 1611c. 1841. 2030 M^K gig sams (μετ’ αὐτοῦ ὁ is replaced)

| ο μετ αυτου ο P 2329

| μετα τουτο ο 051 M^A

| οι μετ αυτου ο A sams bo

| txt κ (– ο 1611*). 1854. 2053. 2062. 2344 lat

* την εικονα κ* 1611. 2053. 2062 (τῆ εικόνη is replaced)

| το χαραγμα 046

* βληθησονται M^A (ἐβλήθησαν is replaced)

*¹ την καιομενην 046. 051. 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2030. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2344 M gig (τῆς καιομένης is replaced)

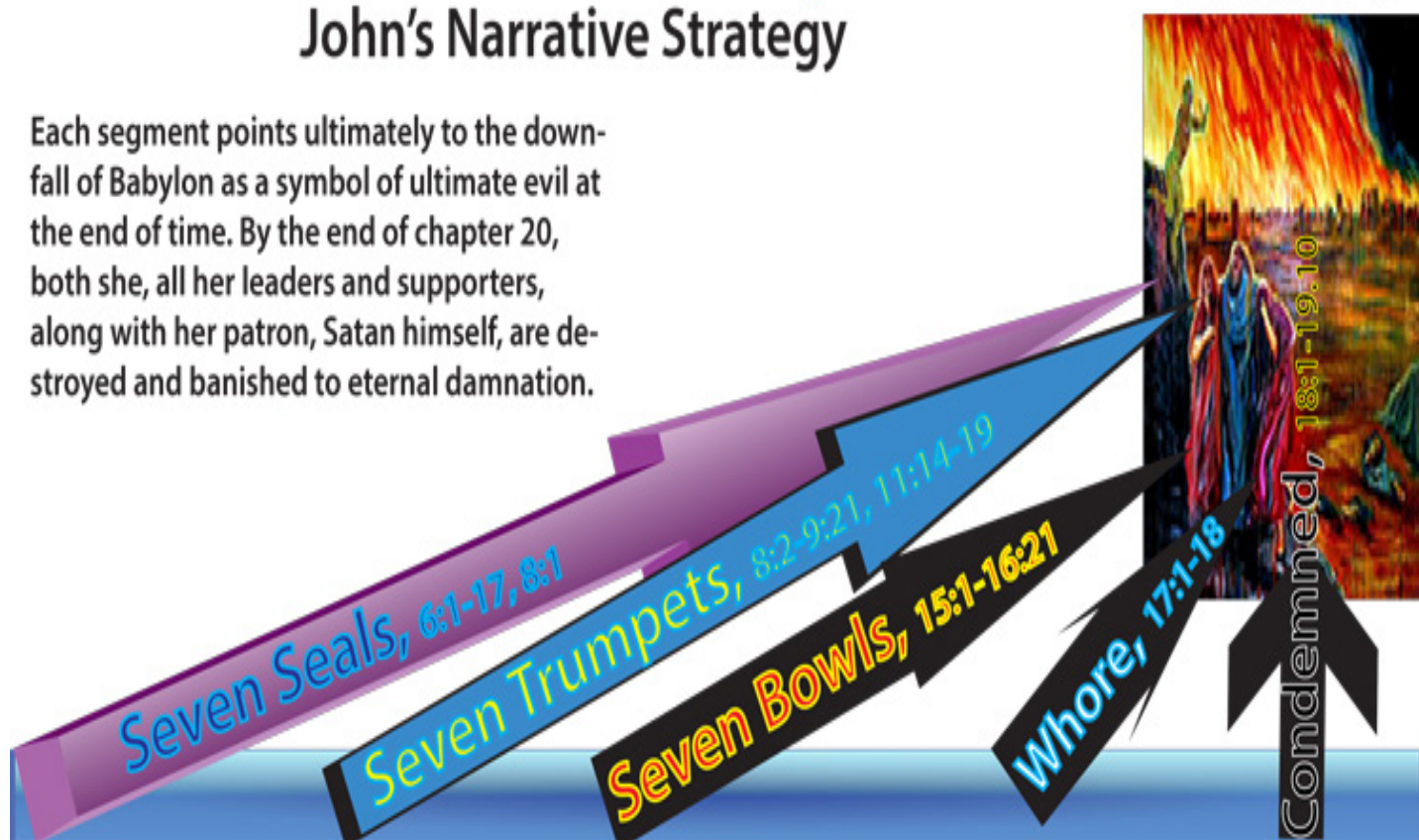
| txt κ A P lat

The Downfall of Babylon

John's Narrative Strategy

Babylon Destroyed,
19:11-21; 20:7-15

Each segment points ultimately to the downfall of Babylon as a symbol of ultimate evil at the end of time. By the end of chapter 20, both she, all her leaders and supporters, along with her patron, Satan himself, are destroyed and banished to eternal damnation.



Again as is always the case, most of these variations surface in manuscripts that are on the outer edge of significance for text determination. Additionally here the majority of variations represent efforts at updating the thought flow of the Greek to what was more natural at the time and/or the place of the copying, thus a stylistic change. For example, in v. 18 ἐπ' αὐτῶν, upon them, is rewritten to either ἐπ' αὐτοῦς or ἐπ' αὐτοῖς. The genitive case αὐτῶν with the preposition ἐπί was deemed either accusative case αὐτοῦς or dative case αὐτοῖς as more appropriate at the different times of the copying by the copyists. The meaning remains the same but the role of cases with the preposition shifted over time and also with different geographical locations.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text with high confidence that it was the original wording of what John wrote.

Internal History. Some time and place issues surface here such as the symbolism of the white horse but these are primarily exegetical issues more than background concerns.

Literary Aspects:

As we have noticed consistently with the apocalyptic visionary writing, the literary aspects almost always place a more influential role in interpretation than do the historical aspects. That remains the case here as well.

Genre: Rev. 19:11-21 continues the apocalyptic vision of John pertaining to the huge conflict between good and evil happening at the end of time before the eternal order is set in motion. John has labeled it in a variety of ways in the chapters leading up to this point beginning with chapter five forward. Probably the best known label is Armageddon that John used in 16:16. The above graphic illustrates this point.

Sub units are framed by repetition of Καὶ εἶδον, And I saw..., at vv. 11, 17, 19. The Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον, And I saw an angel, in 20:1 marks the ending of the third sub-unit in vv. 17-21. Possibly in the background of the first unit in vv. 11-16 is the royal wedding image of Psalm 45. But the apocalyptic role of a conquering warrior dominate the image more than that of the wedding of a king as in Psalm 45.⁸ This image in chapter 19 focuses

* τω 051 M^A (the article τῶ is inserted after ἐν)

[Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 780–781.]

⁸Note how the image of Christ shifts here in 19:11-16 from that found at the beginning of Revelation in 1:12-16. Earlier Christ is presented as a wise sage watching over the integrity of His people.
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on a description of a warrior who easily triumphs over the combined forces of all evil, both human and supernatural in vv. 17-21.⁹ Here [Isaiah 63:1-3](#) help shape the depiction. Also the scene in the apocryphal [Wisdom of Solomon 18:15-16](#) influenced by [Exod. 15:3-4](#) provides background terminology. Thus appropriate depictions of His visual appearance, His names and His tasks are given.¹⁰

In the second (vv. 17-18) and third (vv. 19-21) units of vv. 17-21, the imagery of the Gog and Magog oracle of Ezek. 38-39 stand in the background, which is also used apocalyptically in the *Qumran War Scroll, Milḥāmāh*, 1QM 11:16-17. But important deviations from this background image are also present.¹¹ This

ple in the churches. This reminds us vividly that images in Revelation are never intended as literal, but as symbolic presentations of specific themes appropriate to the immediate context of what is being presented. Also in chapter five the image of a slaughtered Lamb dominates this text.

⁹“Rev 19:11–16 is a descriptive passage that focuses on the figure of an eschatological warrior king coming to wage war on the nations. The imagery in this passage is very complex and exhibits parallels with a number of texts in the OT and early Judaism in which either God or the Messiah (particularly in the later targumic texts) is depicted as a warrior. The metaphor of God as a bloodstained divine warrior occurs in Isa 63:1–3, a passage that has influenced subsequent descriptions.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1048.]

¹⁰“The literary form of this unit is the symbolic description, which focuses on the description, identity, and tasks of the rider on the white horse (see Comment on the symbolic description in 1:12–16). (1) His description: (a) his eyes are like a fiery flame (v 12); (b) he has many diadems on his head (v 12); (c) he wears a robe dipped in blood (v 13); and (d) a sharp sword issues from his mouth (v 15a). (2) His identity (names): (a) he is ‘faithful and true’ (v 11); (b) he has a name inscribed, which he alone knows (v 12b); (c) his name is ‘the Word of God’ (v 13b); and (d) on his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed: ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ (v 16). (3) His tasks: (a) he judges in righteousness (v 11b); (b) he wages war in righteousness (v 11b); (c) he smites the nations with the sharp sword projecting from his mouth (v 15a); (d) he will rule the nations with a rod of iron (v 15b); and (e) he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. The indicators of the symbolic nature of this description include the mention of the sharp sword that proceeds from his mouth (v 15a) and the metaphorical interpretation of the wine that is pressed as ‘the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty’ (v 15c).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1047.]

¹¹“This unit of text is framed by the formulas *καὶ εἶδον ἕνα ἄγγελον*, ‘then I saw an angel’ (v 17a), and *καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον*, ‘then

529 I saw heaven opened,

and
behold

530 a white horse and the One sitting (was) [being called] faithful and true,

upon it
and
in righteousness

final battle scene is presented three separate times in Revelation: 16:12-21; 19:17-21, and 20:7-10. In the sixth and seventh bowls of wrath in 16:12-21 the great destruction of Babylon is presented in this final battle. In 19:11-21 she is completely destroyed with her human leaders, the beast and the false prophet being banished into the lake of fire in final defeat. In 20:7-10, Satan leads the battle, but in defeat he joins the beasts in the lake of fire. This ushers in the final judgment in 20:11-15, where evil individuals are cast into this lake of fire as well. In successive scenes evil is utterly defeated and banished into eternal damnation.

Literary Setting: The above description also helps to set up the literary context of 19:11-21. In chapters 17 and 18 the presentations center on the evil of Babylon and thus her impending doom as a righteous judgment of Almighty God. The heavenly celebration in advance of this doom brings this material to a climax. Then beginning in 19:11 her doom and all who are connected to her are destroyed. This is presented in successive expressions that run to the end of chapter 20. Thus through a diverse set of images John presents the total destruction of evil at the end of time which triggers the beginning of the eternal order of blessing for God’s people that are then presented in the final two chapters of Revelation.

Literary Structure: The block diagram below

I saw an angel’ (20:1a, where it introduces the next unit of text), and by the references to birds in vv 17 and 21. This narrative unit consists of an apocalyptic scenario, based on the tradition of the inviolability of Zion, in which the kings of the earth gather in an unsuccessful attempt to conquer Jerusalem. One of the primary models for this scenario is the Gog and Magog oracle of Ezek 38–39 (also referred to in 1QM 11:16–17). There are two major variants of this apocalyptic scenario: (1) the hostile nations are destroyed by divine intervention before they actually conquer Jerusalem (Rev 19:17–21; 20:7–10; cf. Pss 46; 48:1–8; 76:1–9; Isa 17:12–14; 29:1–8; Ezek 38:1–23; 39:1–6; Joel 3:1–17; Zech 12:1–9; Sib. Or 3.657–701; 1 Enoch 56:5–8; 100:1–6; 4 Ezra 13:5–11, 29–38; Lactantius Div. Inst. 7.17), and (2) the hostile nations temporarily conquer Jerusalem but are eventually repulsed by divine intervention (Rev 11:2; Zech 14:1–11; Pss. Sol. 17:11–25; Luke 19:41–44; 21:20–24).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1047.]

visually presents the internal arrangement of primary and secondary ideas within the passage.

19.11 And

B

gather together

for the supper
| the great one
| of God

/-----|

19.18

so that you may devour the flesh
of kings
and
the flesh
of tribunes
and
the flesh
of the mighty
and
the flesh
of horses
and
of the riders
upon them
and
the flesh
of all
| freedmen
| both and
| slaves
| and
of the small and the great.

19.19

And

544 I saw the beast
and
the kings of the earth
and
their armies

gathered
to make war
with the One sitting
on His horse
and
with His army.

19.20

And

545 the beast was seized
and
with him

546 (was seized) the false prophet

who did miracles
in his presence,
by which he deceived _
/-----|
those having received the mark of the beast
and
those who worshipped his image;

547 while living
were cast these two
into the lake of fire

which burns
with sulphur.

19.21

And

548 the rest were killed
by the sword
of the One sitting
on His horse
that comes out
of His mouth,
and
549 all the birds feasted
on their flesh.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure

The three *Καὶ εἶδον...*, *And I saw...*, define clearly a three fold structure for this passage as 1) #s 521-541; 2) #s 542-543; and 3) #s 544-549. First, John saw heaven opened; then he saw an angel; and finally he saw the beast with the kings and their armies.

What he saw when heaven opened up was the white horse and its Rider. An initial depiction of moral and spiritual traits follows (#s 530-532). The a symbolical description of these is given (#s 533-540). His identity via special name concludes the description (# 541).

Secondly John sees one particular angel standing in the brilliance of the sun (# 542) and calling all the vultures of the sky to come feast on the corpses of those about to be killed by the One sitting on the white horse (# 543).

Thirdly, John sees the beast, the leader of Babylon, assembled with all his forces for the battle in which he and everyone with him are destroyed (#s 544-549).

The climax of all the emphasis upon Babylon now is reached in the rather graphic depiction of her destruction with the banishment of the two beasts into the lake of fire and the killing of all of the assembled armies fighting for the beast.

Exegesis of the Text:

These three subunits identified above will form the basis for exegeting the passage of scripture. The general theme is the victory of Christ over evil.

A. *The presentation of the Rider on the white horse, vv. 11-16.*

11 *Καὶ εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἠνεωγμένον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος λευκὸς καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν [καλούμενος] πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, καὶ ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ. 12 οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά, ἔχων ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός, 13 καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον βεβαμμένον αἵματι, καὶ κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.*

14 *Καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐφ’ ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν. 15 καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, καὶ αὐτὸς ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ*

σιδηρᾶ, καὶ αὐτὸς πατεῖ τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, 16 καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον· Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων.

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

14 And the armies of heaven, wearing 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 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.”

John begins with seeing access to heaven opened up so that Christ on the white horse can be fully seen. The introductory statement opens the scene: *Καὶ εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἠνεωγμένον*, and I saw heaven opened. Things being opened in Revelation include heaven (19:11) and the temple (11:19; 15:5). The difference between these two is very small, if any difference at all. John is looking up into the sky from an earthly perspective here and sees the outer canopy of the sky with an opening created in it so that he can peer into the dwelling place of God. This opening is described as an entrance door in 4:1, *θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ*.¹² The image here is an adaptation of Ezekiel 1:1, *καὶ ἐγένετο ... καὶ ἠνεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδον ὀράσεις θεοῦ*, And it happened...and the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.¹³ The image of heaven being opened is a com-

¹²For other images elsewhere in the NT of heaven being opened see Matthew 3:16; Mark. 1:10; John 1:51; Acts 10:11.

¹³“11. *καὶ εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἠνεωγμένον, καὶ ἰδοὺ κτλ.*] So Ezekiel begins his prophecy (1:1 *καὶ ἐγένετο ... καὶ ἠνεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδον ὀράσεις θεοῦ*); and a similar epiphany is described in 3 Macc. 6:18 *τότε ὁ μεγαλόδοξος θεὸς ... ἠνέφξεν τὰς οὐρανίους πύλας, ἐξ ὧν δεδοξασμένοι δύο φοβεροειδεῖς ἄγγελοι κατέβησαν*. In the Gospels the heavens are opened to Jesus at His Baptism (Mt. 3:16, Mc. 1:10 *εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Lc. 3:21*) and He promises a like vision to His disciples (Jo. 1:51 *ὄψεσθε τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεωγῶτα*). Early in the Apocalypse a door



mon picture in Jewish apocalyptic literature, and is also found in the Greco-Roman writings as well.¹⁴

is opened in heaven (4:1), and the Sanctuary itself is opened more than once (11:19, 15:5); angels frequently descend from heaven (10:1, 14:17, 18:1). The present revelation is on a larger scale; the heavens themselves open to disclose the glorified Christ. Sounds from heaven have been heard already (19:1); the Bride has made herself ready (v. 7 f.), the marriage supper of the Lamb is at hand (v. 9). But it is neither as the Bridegroom nor as the Lamb that the Christ is now revealed; the parted heavens shew a Figure seated on a white horse, a royal commander, followed by a dazzling retinue.” [Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2d. ed., Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), 246.]

¹⁴“The motif of ‘the open heaven,’ frequently linked to a verb of seeing, is more common in early Jewish apocalyptic literature (2 Apoc. Bar. 22:1; 4Q213–14 Aramaic Testament of Levi 2 ii 19–21 [Eisenman-Wise, *Scrolls*, 136–41]; T. Levi 2:6; Jos. As. 14:3; Apoc. Mos. 35:2 [Eve tells Seth to see “the seven heavens opened”]; T. Abr. [Rec. A] 7:3) and early Christianity (Mark 1:10 [= Matt 3:16; Luke 3:21]; John 1:51; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Herm. Vis. 1.1.4; T. Jud. 24:2 [an allusion to the baptism of Jesus in a chapter that is largely a Christian composition; see Ulrichsen, *Grundschrift*, 174, 315]; Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.41–48; Ap. John II/1 1.30–32), where it is frequently used as a way of introducing a divine revelation. On the related motif of the ‘open door in heaven,’ see Comment on 4:1. This motif is also used to signal the beginning of a scene of divine judgment, the earliest reference to which appears to be Isa 64:1–3 (3 Macc 6:18–19; T. Levi 5:1–7 [Levi ascends to heaven after the gates are opened for him by an angel, and he is then commissioned by God to execute vengeance upon Shechem, which he does upon his return to earth; this is judged an interpolation by Ulrichsen, *Grundschrift*, 193]; T. Levi 18:6; 4QTestLevia 2:17–18). This motif is found in PGM XXXVI.298–300, a magical papyrus with a strong Jewish orientation: ‘The heaven of heavens opened, and the angels of God descended and overturned the five cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Segor.’ The combination of the motifs of the open heavens and the descent of Jesus who radiates light (his first coming) is found in the *Pistis Sophia* 1.4. The motif of ‘the opening of heaven’ is also used in the Greco-Roman world in connection with revelatory signs or omens (Vergil *Aeneid* 9.20, ‘I see the heavens part asunder [medium video discedere caelum]’).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1052.]

What John then saw is highlighted by the particle of emphasis *ἰδοὺ*, **behold!** The image of Christ that John describes relates to the initial image in 1:12–16. A few common depictions are present but mostly the two depictions are different from one another by depicting a sage and a warrior.

Rev. 1:13-16	Rev. 19:11b-13
<p>13b ὁμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν. 14 ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρὸς 15 καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρα ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.</p> <p>like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 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.</p> <p>The bold face type represents common items.</p>	<p>11b ἵππος λευκός καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν [καλούμενος] πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός, καὶ ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ. 12 οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλὰ, ἔχων ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός, 13 καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον βεβαμμένον αἵματι, καὶ κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. 14 Καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐφ’ ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν. 15 καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, καὶ αὐτὸς ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, καὶ αὐτὸς πατεῖ τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, 16 καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον· Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων.</p> <p>11b and there was a white horse! Its rider 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 inscribed that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, wearing 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 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.”</p>

These two very different descriptions, and also the

third depiction in 5:6 as a slaughtered but resurrected Lamb, are different symbolic representations with each serving to distinct roles in differing thematic emphasis.

In John's depiction in 19:11-16 several previous image aspects are picked up from earlier references.¹⁵ Thus the depiction has linkage to these earlier references. Particularly significant is the depiction of this scene earlier in 14:12-20. There the image is of the Son of Man seated on a cloud:

Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ νεφέλη λευκή, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν νεφέλην καθήμενον ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, ἔχων ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ στέφανον χρυσοῦν καὶ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ δρέπανον ὀξύ.

And I saw, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud sitting was One like the Son of Man, having upon His head a gold crown and in His hand a sharp sickle.

The scene depicts Him swinging His sickle across the earth in gathering the harvest (v. 16). An angel swings his sickle across the earth and gathers a harvest of evil that is thrown into the wine press of God's wrath. Blood as high as a horse's bridle flows from the wine press for a radius of 200 miles. (vv. 17-20). The crushing of evil in final judgment here is presented under the image of a grape harvest. This climax then sets up the seven bowls of wrath with the sixth and seventh bowls in 16:12-21 coming back to this same scene of the crushing of evil at the end by God in the battle of Harmagedon.

How is Christ depicted in this final scene in 19:11-16? Everything here flows off who Christ is in both his character (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός) and actions coming out of His character (κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ).

¹⁵“Links with the figure of Christ earlier in the vision are confirmed by the description of the rider (v. 12), which harks back to the description of the Son of Man (1:14): ‘His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems’ (cf. 12:3; 13:1). He has a name ‘inscribed’ that no one knows but himself (echoing 2:17), a name that contrasts with the widely used name of the beast (13:17). This rider’s name is ‘The Word of God’ (v. 13; cf. John 1:1; Wis 18:15 [NRSV]: ‘Your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne./ into the midst of the land that was doomed,/ a stern warrior/ carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command,/ and stood and filled all things with death’). And on his robe and his thigh are inscribed the words, ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ (v. 16; cf. 1:5; 17:14; Deut 10:17; 1 Cor 8:6). The word κύριος (kyrios) is usually used to describe God, but here it describes the divine warrior. He is wearing a garment that has been dipped in blood (v. 13), a hint that he is the Lamb who stood as if it had been slaughtered (5:6; cf. Isa 63:1ff.), bearing the marks of his own blood. He leads the heavenly armies, who are riding white horses and are clad in white linen (cf. 18:12; 19:8), like the white garments of the elders and the righteous one (4:4; 6:11; 7:9; cf. 3:4). From this rider’s mouth comes ‘a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations’ (in 1:16 it is a two-edged sword; cf. 2:12; Isa 11:4; 49:2).” [Duane F. Watson, “The Book of Revelation,” in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 699.]

His character stated, v. 11. Christ is seated upon a white horse, as John sees when heaven is opened: εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἠνεωγμένον, καὶ ἰδοῦ ἵππος λευκός. This image comes out of 6:2, καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ ἵππος λευκός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἔχων τόξον καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στέφανος καὶ ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ. **And I saw and behold a white horse and the One sitting upon it having a bow and was given to Him a crown and He came out conquering and to conquer.** The white horse stands as a symbol of victory and here in advance of the battle, rather than following a battle won in the culture of John's day. Thus the victory of Christ over evil is absolutely assured before the conflict takes place.

Christ as the conquering Warrior sits upon this horse and is known and recognized (καλούμενος) by two fundamental traits: πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, faithful and true. The first adjective πιστὸς, in the 8 uses in Rev, mostly refers to either the saints of God (2:10, 13; 17:14) or the writings making up Revelation (21:5; 22:6). It is used of Christ in 1:5 (ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστὸς, the faithful witness) and 19:11. The idea of dependability is central to this adjective. The second adjective ἀληθινός underscores the linkage of Christ to God as Truth, who defines reality by His being and character. Interestingly, the combining of these two adjectives, πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, is found only here in reference to Christ and later in reference to what God orally spoke to John for writing down (21:5; 22:6). This provides the background for Christ being named ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, the Word of God, in v. 13.

But in biblical terms character issues forth in concrete action. Thus ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ, in righteousness He judges and conducts war. Therefore, ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ becomes the manner in which πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός expresses themselves in the specific actions of κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ. Given His character judging and making war could only be conducted ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ. The noun δικαιοσύνη is only used here and in 22:11 inside Revelation. The action orientation of δικαιοσύνη is more clearly expressed in 22:11 in the statement ὁ δίκαιος δικαιοσύνην ποιησάτω ἔτι, **Let the righteous still do righteousness.** The idea is simple: the actions of an individual will reflect who the person is in character. Parallel to this statement in 22:11 is καὶ ὁ ἅγιος ἁγιασθήτω ἔτι, **and let the holy one still be holy.** Thus the one dedicated to the Lord is to continue living in that dedication.

Thus Christ renders judgments and makes war upon evil in a manner consistent with who He is as the divine Son of God.

His appearance reflecting this character, vv. 12-15. This description of character and actions in v. 11 then is ‘fleshed out’ symbolically in apocalyptic imagery. And these images are gathered up from previous references for the most part. In the seven de-

pictions the first four come out of the character traits πιστός και ἀληθινός and the last three come out of the action depictions ἐν δικαιοσύνη κρίνει και πολεμεῖ.

1) οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός, **and his eyes are like a flame of fire** (v. 12a). In both 1:14 and 2:18 Christ's eyes are described as like a flame of fire. In the background stands the Aramaic phrase ܘܫ ܝܕ ܝܘܠܗ from Dan. 10:6 where the LXX Theod. version translates it as ὡσεὶ λαμπάδες πυρός, **like flaming torches**.¹⁶ The penetrating gaze of Christ the warrior identifies clearly His enemies and the basis for their destruction.

2) **καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλὰ, ἔχων ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός, and upon His head are many diadems containing a written name which no one knows except Him** (v. 12b). Although the dragon wears seven diadems (12:3) and the beast ten (13:1), Christ's many diadems reflects a superior power and authority. The idea of a name(s) being written down either on the body of an individual or on papyrus writing 'paper' is common in Revelation: 2:17 (a stone); 13:8 (book of life); 14:1 (forehead); 17:5 (forehead); 17:8 (book of life); 19:12 (head); 19:16 (thigh); 20:15 (book of life); 21:17 (book of life). The Semitic based idiom ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός, **which no one knows except Him**, reflects the idea that no one outside of Christ fully understands who He is outside of Christ alone. It first appears in 2:17 and 3:12 reflecting identity known only to the recipient(s). Out of the Jewish heritage where name equals full identity of the person, the point is that the evil forces do not grasp who the warrior is that they are preparing to fight.¹⁷ Also against the pagan super-

¹⁶“The phrase ὡς φλόξ πυρός occurs three times in Jos. As.: (1) in Jos. As. 14:9 as part of a description of an angel, ‘the hairs of his head like a flame of fire of a burning torch’; (2) in Jos. As. 17:8, ‘the chariot was like a flame of fire’; and (3) in Jos. As. 23:15, ‘their swords were flashing forth (something) like a flame of fire.’ φλόξ πυρός also occurs in Pr. Man. frag. (Denis, Fragmenta, 117) and in Apoc. Elijah frag. c in a description of the Antichrist (Denis, Fragmenta, 104): ἡ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ φλόξ πυρός, ‘his head is a burning flame’.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1054.]

¹⁷“The view is expressed in Plato Cratylus 400d–e that people do not know the true names of the gods that the gods use of themselves; they can only know those names traditionally used in prayers and invocations. Iamblichus (De myst. 7.4; E. des Places, ed., Les Mysteres d’Egypte [par] Jamblique [Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1966] 191) observed that some names of the gods are known and others unknown, but those that are known have been revealed by the gods themselves.

“One feature of Greco-Roman mythological literature is that supernatural beings, as well as other features of the cosmos known to humans, have names by which they are known on earth but also secret names that are known only to the gods and to those to whom the gods choose to reveal them: e.g., Iliad 1.403–4, ‘whom the gods call Briareus, but all men Aegaeon’ (see also Iliad 2.813–14; 14.290–91; 20.74; Scholia in Hom. Iliad. 1.403 [ed. W. Dindorf, Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875) 1:51]; Odyssey 10.305; 12.61; Hesiod, frag. 296 [R. Merkelbach

stitious belief that knowing a god's secret name gives some leverage over the deity, John asserts the ignorance of these pagans of the actual identity of Christ.

3) **καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον βεβαμμένον αἵματι, and clothed with a robe dipped in blood** (v. 13a). One uncertainty here is whether the blood stained robe was stained in Christ's atoning death (chap. 5) or whether the staining comes from the blood of those He destroys in this battle.¹⁸ The contextual evidence (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11) favors the former view over the external signals coming from the OT (Exod 15; Deut 33; Judg 5; Hab 3; Isa 26:16–27:6; 59:15–20; 63:1–6; Zech 14:1–21) **that favor the latter view. This white robe, already given** and M. L. West, eds., *Fragmenta Hesiodica* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967)]; Pindar, *Hymni frag. 33e* [H. Maehler, ed., *Pindari Carmina cum fragmentis*, post B. Suell, 8th ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987–89)]; Athenaeus *Deipn.* 14.643a; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 10.23; Prayer of Joseph [Origen *Comm. in Ioann.* II.31], ὁ κληθεὶς ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων Ἰακώβ, “called ‘Jacob’ by people”]; Pistis Sophia 137 contains a list of the five archons with both their celestial names and the names they are called by humans (see Güntert, *Sprache der Götter*, 102–16, who demonstrates the tendency to regard common terms as human, but uncommon, yet genuine, Greek terms as divine). The fear that the correct name of the god or gods may be unknown is reflected in the ancient liturgical formula ὅστις ποτὶ ἐστίν, ‘whoever he is,’ used in Greek prayers and invocations (Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 160; Euripides *Troas.* 885–86; Athenaeus 8.334b [used in parody]); see E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 143–47. The Pistis Sophia 1.10 (ed. Schmidt-Till, p. 10, lines 20–21; ed. Schmidt-MacDermot, p. 16) refers to a heavenly form of writing as ‘in the manner of writing of those of the height.’ The secrecy of divine names also features in some Gnostic documents (e.g., Gos. Truth 38.16–32). The same motif occurs in folktales; in the fairy tale about Rumpelstiltskin, a famous line runs *Ei wie gut dass niemand weiss, dass ich Rumpelstilzchen heiss*, ‘Oh, how good that no one knows, that I am named Rumpelstiltskin.’ The secrecy surrounding the name of the heavenly figure in Rev 19:12c has a parallel in Jos. As. 15:12 in the speech of the mysterious heavenly revealer (tr. C. Burchard, *OTP* 2:227).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1056.]

¹⁸“The blood mentioned here is not primarily a metaphor for the atoning death of Christ (see Comments on 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11) but rather a literal reference to the heavenly warrior whose garment is stained with the blood of those he has slain (Allo, 304–5). The imagery of a bloodstained divine warrior coming to destroy his enemies occurs in a number of texts in the OT and early Judaism (Exod 15; Deut 33; Judg 5; Hab 3; Isa 26:16–27:6; 59:15–20; 63:1–6; Zech 14:1–21; see T. Hiebert, “Warrior, Divine,” *ADB* 6:876–80; Miller, *Divine Warrior*), one of the oldest of which is Isa 63:1–3 (quoted above in *Form/Structure/Setting* on 19:11–21). An even closer parallel to Rev 19:11–16, which reveals the influence of the messianic interpretation of Isa 63:1–6 in early Judaism (perhaps influenced also by Joel 3:17–21 [MT 4:17–21] [Syrén, *Targums*, 105]), is found in almost identical versions in all the Palestinian Targums with the exception of Targum Onqelos (Syrén, *Targums*, 111–12). All three versions of Gen 49:11 in the targums are quoted above in *Form/Structure/Setting* on 19:11–21.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1057.]

the power of the sacrificial blood of Christ, is the basis of His purity and righteousness as the Son of God. As chapter five presents, it is this sacrificial action of the Lamb that qualifies Him to reveal to John the contents of the divine plan for the end of human history and the eternal order of things.

4) **καὶ κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, and His name is called the Word of God** (v. 13b). The affirmation here of the open identity of Christ -- in contrast to the secret identity in v. 12b -- links Christ to the sword coming out of His mouth (v. 15).¹⁹ But additionally they link Christ to the larger Johannine community where Christ as the incarnate Word (cf. Jhn 1:1-18) becomes the divine Presence of God inside the Christian community. The pagan world has no knowledge of Christ, but the believing community understands Christ as the very Presence of God Himself in their midst. The white robe dipped in His sacrificial blood is the difference between knowing and not knowing.

5) **Καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐφ' ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, and His armies in heaven followed Him upon white horses and clothed in fine linen white and pure** (v. 14). This begins the threefold development of the action emphasis in the ἐν δικαιοσύνη κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ expression in v. 11.

This insertion of reference to the armies accompanying Christ raises the question of where they are angels (cf. 12:7) or the martyred saints (cf. 20:9). The host of angels accompanying God coming in judgment is the normal image in the OT: Deut. 33:3; Zech. 14:5; Dan. 7:10; Ps. 68:17; cf. also 1 Enoch 1:9 that is quoted in Jude 14). In the early Christian tradition of the parousia of Christ, a host of angels accompanies Christ in His return: Mk. 8:38; Mt. 16:27; Lk. 9:26; 2 Thess. 1:7; cf. Did. 16:7). But in 1 Thess. 3:16 and 4:13-18 the return is presented as Christ returning with His saints. At first glance their garments, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, **clothed in fine linen white clean**, seems to favor the saints in light of 19:8 where the bride of Christ is described as wearing βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν, **fine linen shining clean**. But in 15:6 the seven angels who emerge from the heavenly temple are ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν, **dressed in linen clean shining**. The language in 15:6 is a virtual synonym of that in 19:8, 14 with both

¹⁹Somewhat related is the apocryphal **Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-16** depicting the God's slaying of the Egyptian first born in the tenth and final plague. :

For while gentle silence enveloped all things,
and night in its swift course was now half gone,
your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne,
into the midst of the land that was doomed,
a stern warrior
carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command,
and stood and filled all things with death,
and touched heaven while standing on the earth.

λίνον and βύσσινον referring to linen garments. Whether saints or angels, a host of holy, pure individuals accompanies Christ in His coming in judgment on the evil of the world.

6) **καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, καὶ αὐτοὺς ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, and out of His mouth comes a sharp sword so that with it He may strike the nations, and He personally will rule over them with a rod of iron** (v. 15a). A sword coming out of Christ's mouth is found with variations in 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21. An interesting variation of this image is found in 2 Thess. 2:8, καὶ τότε ἀποκαλυφθήσεται ὁ ἄνομος, ὃν ὁ κύριος [Ἰησοῦς] ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσῃ τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ, **and then will be destroyed the lawless one by the breath of His mouth and He will completely destroy him at His coming**. Both of these images, along with the rod of iron, are taken from Isa. 11:4 and 49:2.²⁰

Isa. 11:4. ἀλλὰ κρινεῖ ταπεινῶ κρίσιν καὶ ἐλέγξει τοὺς ταπεινοὺς τῆς γῆς· καὶ πατάξει γῆν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν πνεύματι διὰ χειλέων ἀνελεῖ ἄσεβῆ.

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**.

Isa. 49:2. καὶ ἔθηκεν τὸ στόμα μου ὡσεὶ μάχαιραν ὀξεῖαν καὶ ὑπὸ τὴν σκέπην τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἔκρυψέν με, ἔθηκεν με ὡς βέλος ἐκλεκτὸν καὶ ἐν τῇ φαρέτρᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐσκέπασέν με.

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.

What Christ says expresses the full power of God and carries with it the destructive power to wipe out the as-

²⁰Also Psalm 2 plays an important background role, as Aune correctly notes:

This phrase is an allusion to Ps 2:9, interpreted messianically, together with Isa 11:4 (see v 15a above). Ps 2:9 is alluded to twice elsewhere in Revelation (2:26; 12:5) but nowhere else in the NT (the allusion in 12:5 appears to be a gloss; see Comment there). Various passages from Ps 2 are frequently alluded to in Revelation (Ps 2:1 in Rev 11:18; Ps 2:2 in Rev 6:15; 11:15; 17:18; 19:19; Ps 2:5 in Rev 11:18; Ps 2:8 in Rev 2:26; Ps 2:9 in Rev 12:5; 19:15; Ps 2:12 in Rev 11:18). In Pss. Sol. 17:23-24, the allusion to Ps 2:9 is clearly interpreted messianically. The allusion to Ps 2:9 assures the messianic understanding of the rider on the white horse. The future tense of ποιμανεῖ, "he will rule," makes it clear that this clause, like the ἵνα, "that," clause in v 15a, is not part of the description of the rider but a messianic interpretation of his role, in which the "sharp sword" is construed as functionally equivalent to the "iron crook."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1061.]

sembled armies of all the earth in one spoken word. The rod was the shepherd's tool for disciplining control over his flock as well as his weapon for fighting off wild animals seeking to attack his flock. The stern control and destructive power of the shepherd against enemies is set forth here in both the verb ποιμανεῖ, *rules over*, and the instrument of attack, ῥάβδω σιδηρᾷ, *the rod of iron*. This image is picked up from 12:5, ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδω σιδηρᾷ, *she gave birth to a male son who is going to rule all the nations with a rod of iron*. The rod and the sword are but two images asserting the unparalleled power of Jesus' spoken word to destroy all His enemies.



7) **καὶ αὐτὸς πατεῖ τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος,**²¹ **and He personally treads the wine press of the anger of God's wrath, the Almighty One** (v. 15b). This final image of the warrior Christ pictures Him at grape harvest time enforcing the awesome wrath of God upon His enemies. Christ alone is pictured as tromping down (αὐτὸς πατεῖ τὴν ληνὸν) the 'grapes,' the evil people of this world, and the juice, i.e., their blood, pours out into the side pit.

In the background stands Isa. 63:2-3 with the wine press as an image of divine judgment upon Edon. Interestingly in post OT Jewish writings Edon became

²¹Note in the Greek an awkward string of five Genitive case nouns strung together, τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, not found anywhere else in Revelation.

The awkward string of five genitives found in this verse is the longest such string in Revelation (see Comment on 15:5 and Note 19:15.c-c.). The sentence is difficult to interpret. Bousset ([1906] 432) and Charles (2:137, apparently following Bousset) observe that the author mixes his metaphors by combining the image of the wine press (cf. 14:19) with that of the cup of wrath (cf. 14:10). The phrase ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ, "the anger of God," occurs earlier in the forms "your anger" (11:18) and "his anger" (14:10; 16:19); Rev 6:16 extends this concept as "the anger of the Lamb." The phrase "the anger of God" occurs several times in the NT (John 3:36; Rom 1:18; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6), more than two hundred times in the LXX and in Jewish or Christian sepulchral inscriptions (MAMA 6, 25), and frequently in early Jewish literature (Apoc. Zeph. 12; T. Isaac 4:54; T. Levi 6:11; T. Reub. 4:4; 1 Enoch 89:33; 99:16; Sib. Or 3.632; 4.159-70; Jub. 15:34).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1062.]

a symbol for Rome, and then also in later post-apostolic Christian writings. This image is picked up from 14:19-20 with the same picture but containing the detail that the blood pouring out was the depth of the horse's bridle for a 200 mile radius. The phrase τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς, *of the anger of His wrath*, is picked up from 14:10; 16:19 and cf. 11:18. It stresses the very intense level of God's anger. The phrase τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ, the wrath of God, occurs over 200 times in the LXX translation of the OT; several times elsewhere in the NT, e.g., Jhn 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; and frequently in early Jewish literature.

In this image of the wine press John brings to an intense climax the assertion of God's severe judgment upon evil people on the earth in the judgment of Christ upon them.

His identity revealed in His name, v. 16. καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον· Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων. **On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords."** The description of Christ ends in the disclosure of other names, this time tattooed to His thigh as well as attached to His robe. The two names are picked up from 17:14, although in reverse listing. This statement seems intentionally to be an explanation of the 'secret name' in verse twelve. The two locations of the names both ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ, **upon the robe and upon His thigh**, is quite interesting and somewhat mysterious. Attachment to the robe meant it was visibly clear to all who got close to the rider. Some instances of inscriptions written on the thighs of statues exist but without specific explanation of why they are so located.²² To be sure, horses were often branded with own-

²²The place where the name is written is problematic, and a number of proposals have been made in explanation. There are examples in Greco-Roman literature of inscriptions on the thighs of statues. Pausanias (5.27.12) refers to an elegiac couplet written on the thigh of a statue: "but there is a couplet engraved on its thigh [ἐλεγεῖον δὲ ἐπὶ αὐτὸ γεγραμμένον ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τοῦ μηροῦ], 'To Zeus, Page 959



He so swiftly and easily disposes of all of His enemies in this battle. The nations have assemble to do battle against Him and His people without realizing who they are fighting. But now on the eve of the battle it becomes all too clear that they are fighting a futile battle against One far superior to their collective power. But Christ and His people have known who He actually is all along and thus are not surprised by this disclosure.

B. The angelic calling of the vultures to feast on the corpses of those fighting with the beast, vv. 17-18.

17 Καὶ εἶδον ἓνα ἄγγελον ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ καὶ ἔκραξεν [ἐν] φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγων πᾶσιν τοῖς ὀρνέοις τοῖς πετομένοις ἐν μεσουρανήματι· Δεῦτε συνάχθητε εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ 18 ἵνα φάγητε σάρκας βασιλέων καὶ σάρκας χιλιάρχων καὶ σάρκας ἰσχυρῶν καὶ σάρκας ἵππων καὶ τῶν καθημένων ἐπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ σάρκας πάντων ἔλευθέρων τε καὶ δούλων καὶ μικρῶν καὶ μεγάλων.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, “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.”

The scene now shifts from the opening in heaven

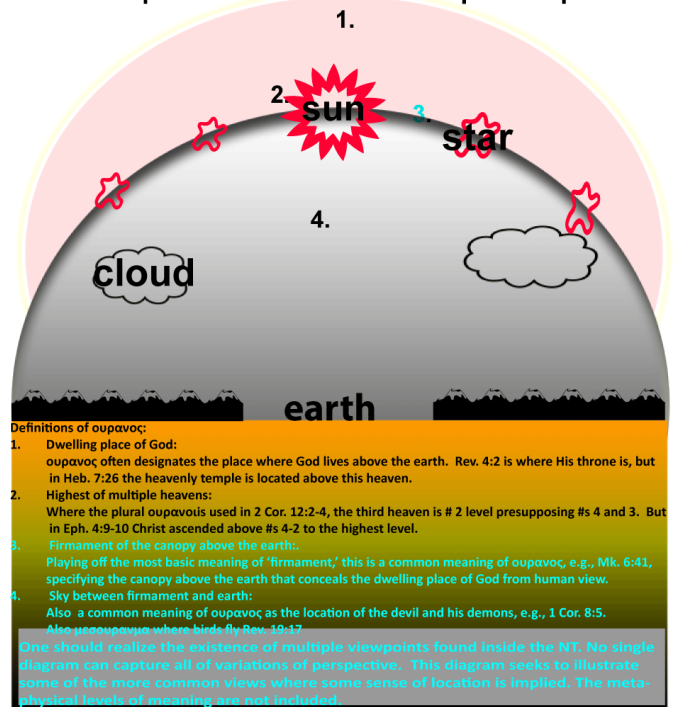
ership names on their thighs. But this is not the thigh of a horse, but of the rider. This very unusual location ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ, upon His thigh, evidently possesses some significance, but what that is stands as a mystery to modern readers. If τὸ ἱμάτιον, His robe, is correctly pictured in the above graphic,²³ even though the sword is not, then the tattooed names would also have been visible to all. And this could well be John’s point.

In 1:5, Christ is identified as ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, the Ruler over the kings of the earth. This stands behind the Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, King of kings, both here and in 17:14. The subsequent phrase, κύριος κυρίων, Lord of lords, means essentially the same thing. Together they assert absolute authority and power over every supposed ruler either human or supernatural. The ‘secret name’ located on Christ’s head in v. 12 (ἔχων modifies κεφαλήν, not the plural διαδήματα) which the evil world doesn’t grasp is now in the movement into battle become plainly clear as the assertion behind why

king of the gods, as first-fruits was I placed here, by the Mendeans / who reduced Sipte by might of hand.’” For two other examples of inscriptions on the thighs of statues, see Cicero Verrine Orations 4.43 and Justin 15.4.5, 9; cf. Neuer Wettstein, ad Rev 19:16. On the magical diagram of a figure in PGM XXXVI (Betz, Greek Magical Papyri, 269), the legs bear the magical name “Brak” (see Eitrem, Papyri Osloenses, 140).” [David E. Aune, Revelation 17–22, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1062.]

²³Interestingly, as noted previously, graphic artists typically take great liberties with the details of the biblical text and re-contextualize their drawings into a modern setting more than an ancient one. This is certainly the case here with the Rider on the white horse drawings for Revelation 19.

Conceptualizations of heaven with spatial emphasis



to the μεσουρανήματι, mid-heaven. The μεσουράνημα is where birds fly above the earth and below the canopy at the top of the sky. John looked up again from earth and this time saw an angel ἑστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ, standing

in the sun. Given the standard ancient Jewish understanding of the world (see above graphic), the angel standing in the sun highlights his coming out of heaven through the portal of the sun which was considered the brightest opening into heaven among all the stars. With the brilliance of the sun shining on him he was perfectly positioned to summons all of the birds flying in the air below him.²⁴ Two other places in Revelation the μεσουράνημα, mid-heaven, is mentioned.²⁵ In 8:13, an eagle flies through it as a divine messenger pronouncing woes upon the inhabitants of the earth. In 14:6, an angel flies through it with the eternal Gospel to proclaim to those living on the earth.

His summons is issued in a loud voice: καὶ ἔκραξεν [ἐν] φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγων πᾶσιν τοῖς ὄρνέοις τοῖς πετομένοις ἐν μεσουρανήματι, and he cried out in a loud voice saying to all the birds flying in the mid-heaven. With the three uses of ὄρνεον in 18:2; 19:17, 21, it is clear that the core meaning of an unclean bird such as a vulture / bulture / Geier or buzzard is the intended reference here. The picture of these birds goring themselves on the dead



flesh of those killed in battle in v. 21 paints this picture unmistakably.

²⁴I am utterly astounded at the ignorance of almost all modern commentators over the significance of this simple phrase ἐστῶτα ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ, standing in the sun. But such is not surprising in light of the inability of a huge percentage of Bible commentators to do sociological analysis of ancient texts in order to generate a clear social history perspective. The tragedy of this is their complete inability to put themselves into an ancient mindset and thus they remain slaves to a modern mindset. Within this modern western mindset, of course, the phrase makes no sense. But that's not how John was thinking! He was a first century Jewish thinker!

This prompts me to thank God again for the help and insights of Prof. Gerd Theissen at Heidelberg university for his help and training in sociological methodology during my year long sabbatical leave there in 1990-1991.

²⁵The word μεσουράνημα literally means 'in the middle of the sky' and in ancient astronomy it had the sense to be at the zenith of the sun. But John in his usage is working out of his Jewish understanding of the structure of the world where μεσουράνημα is the space between the earth and the canopy at the top of the sky.

The angel's message (vv. 17b-18) is a summons to a 'banquet' following the battle against Christ. δεῦτε συνάθητε εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ ἵνα φάγητε σάρκα βασιλέων καὶ σάρκα χιλιάρχων καὶ σάρκα ἰσχυρῶν καὶ σάρκα ἵππων καὶ τῶν καθημένων ἐπ' αὐτῶν καὶ σάρκα πάντων ἐλευθέρων τε καὶ δούλων καὶ μικρῶν καὶ μεγάλων. Come, gather together for the great supper of God so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of the strong and the flesh of horses and of the riders sitting upon them and the flesh of both all freedmen and slaves and of the small and the great.²⁶

What the angel is certain of is the total victory of Christ over all the evil people of the world in that battle. Unburied dead bodies will fill the earth and the vultures will have more to eat than they could ever have imagined. What is interesting about this picture, once you get past the goriness of an image of so much rotting flesh upon the earth at one time, is the detailed specification of John's depiction. The repeated listing of σάρκα, flesh, five times drives home dramatically the utter defeat of all evil in its battle against Christ. A somewhat similar listing of those to be judged is found in 6:15-17.²⁷ The phrase μικρῶν καὶ μεγάλων, small and

²⁶"This invitation is an allusion to Ezek 39:17, where the Lord God tells Ezekiel to say the following: 'Assemble and come, gather from all sides to the sacrificial feast which I am preparing for you.' This appears to be a parody of ancient dinner invitations to share a sacred meal with various pagan deities such as Sarapis. The phrase 'the great supper of God' suggests more specifically that this is a parody of the messianic banquet, a symbol of eschatological joy (Isa 25:6-8; 55:1-2; 65:13-14; 1 Enoch 62:12-16; 2 Apoc. Bar. 29:1-8; m. 'Abot 3:20; Matt 8:11; Luke 13:29; 14:15; 22:16, 29-30; see Priest, "Banquet," 222-38, who does not construe Rev 19:17-21 as a parody; D. Smith, "Messianic Banquet," ADB 4:788-91). The theme of the messianic banquet has its origins in myths that narrate a great battle between the gods, a battle that concludes with an assembly of the gods to celebrate victory and to share a festive meal (Enuma Elish 6.69-94 [Pritchard, ANET, 69]; Isa 34:5-7; Zech 9:15). In Zech 9:15 the meal consists of a bloody sacrifice-banquet of defeated enemies (P. D. Hanson, Dawn, 322; disputed by R. L. Smith, Micah-Malachi, WBC 32 [Waco, TX: Word, 1984] 260, who reads the text positively as a great victory banquet)." [David E. Aune, Revelation 17-22, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1063.]

²⁷Rev. 6:15-17. 15 Καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ μεγιστάνες καὶ οἱ χιλιάρχοι καὶ οἱ πλούσιοι καὶ οἱ ἰσχυροὶ καὶ πᾶς δούλος καὶ ἐλεύθερος ἔκρυσαν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς τὰ σπήλαια καὶ εἰς τὰς πέτρας τῶν ὄρεων 16 καὶ λέγουσιν τοῖς ὄρεσιν καὶ ταῖς πέτραις· πέσετε ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ κρύψατε ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου, 17 ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτῶν, καὶ τίς δύναται σταθῆναι;

15 Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

great, is picked up from 13:16.

Clearly Ezek. 39:17-20 stands in the background of John's image with the prophets prediction of the fall of the ancient city of Gog.²⁸ What John seems to be presenting here is a parody of the Jewish tradition of an eschatological banquet (Isa 25:6-8; 55:1-2; 65:13-14; 1 Enoch 62:12-16; 2 Apoc. Bar. 29:1-8; m. 'Abot 3:20; Matt 8:11; Luke 13:29; 14:15; 22:16, 29-30) that consisted of feeding on the flesh and blood of dead enemies.²⁹ The labeling of this meal as τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ, *the great supper of God*, signals a messianic banquet of a very different kind. In the pagan religious tradition mythical battles between the gods leads to the sharing of a festive victory meal.³⁰

²⁸**Ezek. 39:17-20.** 17 καὶ σύ, υἱὲ ἀνθρώπου, εἰπὸν Τάδε λέγει κύριος Εἰπὸν παντὶ ὄρνέῳ πετεινῷ καὶ πρὸς πάντα τὰ θηρία τοῦ πεδίου Συνάχθητε καὶ ἔρχεσθε, συνάχθητε ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν περικύκλω ἐπὶ τὴν θυσίαν μου, ἣν τέθυκα ὑμῖν, θυσίαν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ φάγεσθε κρέα καὶ πίεσθε αἷμα.† 18 κρέα γιγάντων φάγεσθε καὶ αἷμα ἀρχόντων τῆς γῆς πίεσθε, κριοῦς καὶ μόσχους καὶ τράγους, καὶ οἱ μόσχοι ἐστεατωμένοι πάντες.† 19 καὶ φάγεσθε στέαρ εἰς πλησμονὴν καὶ πίεσθε αἷμα εἰς μέθην ἀπὸ τῆς θυσίας μου, ἧς ἔθυσσα ὑμῖν.† 20 καὶ ἐμπλησθήσεσθε ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης μου ἵππον καὶ ἀναβάτην, γίγαντα καὶ πάντα ἄνδρα πολεμιστήν, λέγει κύριος.†

17 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. 18 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. 19 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. 20 And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with warriors and all kinds of soldiers, says the Lord God.

²⁹“Rev 19:17-18 represents a parody of the Jewish tradition of the eschatological messianic banquet (see Comment on v 17c), because it is an eschatological banquet that consists of feeding on the flesh and blood of dead enemies. Lev. Rab. 11.2 is an exegetical text that links Prov 9:1-6, which focuses on the banquet of wisdom (interpreting the house of wisdom in v 1 as the temple and the seven pillars as the seven years of Gog; cf. Ezek 39:9), to the prophecy of Ezek 39:17-20, which refers to the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, where Ezekiel is asked to invite the birds and wild animals to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the men of Gog. In Lev. Rab. 11.2, however, it is the Israelites who are invited to the banquet.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1064.]

³⁰“The theme of the messianic banquet has its origins in myths that narrate a great battle between the gods, a battle that concludes with an assembly of the gods to celebrate victory and to share a festive meal (Enuma Elish 6.69-94 [Pritchard, ANET, 69]; Isa 34:5-7; Zech 9:15). In Zech 9:15 the meal consists of a bloody sacrifice-banquet of defeated enemies (P. D. Hanson, *Dawn*, 322; disputed by R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC 32 [Waco, TX: Word, 1984] 260, who reads the text positively as a great victory banquet).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1063.]

John's clear point is a dramatic depiction of the defeat of all evil in its battle against Christ.

C. *The destruction of the two beasts and the killing of their armies, vv. 19-21.*

19 Καὶ εἶδον τὸ θηρίον καὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα αὐτῶν συνηγμένα ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον μετὰ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ. 20 καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης ὁ ποιήσας τὰ σημεῖα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν τοὺς λαβόντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ· ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ. 21 καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου τῇ ἐξελεύσει ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, καὶ πάντα τὰ ὄρνεα ἐχορτάσθησαν ἐκ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτῶν.

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. 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 worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 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.

In this third segment the depiction of the final battle takes place, although it is repeated somewhat again in 20:7-10 around the same theme of Gog and Magog but with a focus upon the destruction of Satan and his banishment to the lake of fire. Two sub-scenes are presented here: a) the capture and banishment of the two beasts; and b) the killing off of all the rest of the evil forces gathered with them to fight Christ. In 20:7-10, the defeating of Satan is the focus. By this point all people except for God's people have been killed and are awaiting final judgment from God which is portrayed in 20:11-15. This multi-part presentation of the end of human history serves to highlight the intensity of God's wrath upon the various groups of evil, both human and supernatural, that comes at the end in a single package.³¹

The motif of a final gigantic battle of evil against God is very common in both the Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic literature in particular.³² The ancient

³¹Of course, this doesn't include the earlier presentations periodically from chapter four through chapter eighteen: 6:12-17; 14:9-11; 14:14-20; 16:12-20; 18:1-24. These present the downfall of Babylon as impending but so certain as to be described as a completed event. .

³²“The motif of the gathering and assault of the heathen on the people of God has roots in the OT (Ezek 38:14-16; 39:1-6; Joel 3:2; Zech 12:1-9; 14:2; Ps 2:1-3) and frequently appears in apoc-
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Jewish and Christian communities possessed the wisdom to recognize the increasing spread of evil and its growing hostility toward God and His people. Also the awareness was also clear that only a decisive action by God Himself could terminate this destructive force in the world. John's apocalyptic vision concertizes this understanding as a revelation given to him directly from God.

End of the two beasts, the human leaders of Babylon, vv. 19-20. 19 Καὶ εἶδον τὸ θηρίον καὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα αὐτῶν συνηγμένα ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον μετὰ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ. 20 καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης ὁ ποιήσας τὰ σημεῖα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν τοὺς λαβόντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ· ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ. 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. 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 worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.**

What John saw when he looked across the earth was the assembly of the massive armies under the command of the human leader called τὸ θηρίον, **the beast**. The Roman emperor of John's day represented this person who would appear at the end of time, and John's first readers could take much consolation in this depiction of his utter downfall.

First come the leader and sub-commanders along with their armies in v. 19a. Next is the capture of the beast along with his side-kick the second beast or false prophet. In v. 20 they are thrown in total defeat by Christ into the eternal lake of fire: ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ, **while alive are thrown these two into the lake of fire burning with sulfur.** In apocalyptic literature (1 Enoch 56:5-6; 90:13-19; 99:4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 48:37; 70:7; 4 Ezra 13:33-38; Jub. 23:23; Syb. Or 3.663-68; Pss. Sol. 2:1-2; 17:22-23; T. Jos. 19; LXX Esth 11:5-8; 1QM 1:10-11; 15:2-3; Luke 21:20 [the historicization of this motif]; see Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted*, 77-101). 4 Ezra 13:5 is a clear example of this motif:

After this I looked and saw that an innumerable multitude of people were gathered together from the four winds of heaven to make war against the man who came up out of the sea.

“The specific presence of the motif of the assembling or gathering together (συνάγειν) of hostile forces against the people of God in the last days occurs frequently in such eschatological scenes (Rev 16:14, 16; 19:17, 19; 20:8; see Isa 66:18; Ezek 38:7-8; Zech 12:3; 14:2; 1 Enoch 90:16; 1QM 14:5; 15:3).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1064-1065.]

introducing them in v. 20a John summarizes their evil work that earlier he presented in 13:1-10, 11-18. Note: καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης ὁ ποιήσας τὰ σημεῖα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν τοὺς λαβόντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ; **And was captured the beast and with him the false prophet who did miracles in his presence by which he deceived those having received the mark of the beast and those having worshiped his image.** The connection of the beast to Babylon is pictured in 17:1-6 with Babylon as a prostitute riding the beast as though he were a horse.

The eternal destiny for the two beasts is the lake of fire: εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ, **into the lake of fire that is burning with sulfur.** This image of Hell is repeated some six times in Revelation: 19:21; 20:10; 20:14-15 (3x); 21:8. In the background here stands the image of a volcano crater with burning lava bubbling up in it. Interestingly, no close parallel images to Hell as a lake of fire are found in either the OT, Jewish literature, or Greco-Roman literature.³³ But in Egyptian mythology the underworld as a place of punishment is

³³The closest idea to a lake of fire in the pagan literature is that of a river or rivers of fire in the underworld.

Since eternal fire was believed to be located in Hades in both early Judaism and early Christianity, it is possible that John was not dependent on Egyptian underworld traditions but rather himself combined the traditions of fiery punishment in the netherworld with the notion of a “lake of Hades,” resulting in a lake of fire. The tradition of a fiery river in Hades is also found in Greek and Roman underworld mythology. According to Plato (Phaedo 111D; LCL tr.),

There are everlasting rivers of huge size under the earth, flowing with hot and cold water; and there is much fire, and great rivers of fire, and many streams of mud.

As many as four rivers are connected with Hades (Odyssey 10.513; Plato Phaedo 112E-113C; Cicero De natura deorum 3.43): (1) Styx or Acheron (which separates the realm of the dead from the world of the living), (2) Phlegethon or Pyriphlegethon (meaning “blazing”), (3) Cocytus (in Latin literature), and (4) Lethe (“forgetfulness”). Vergil Aeneid 6.550-51 describes one of the sights Aeneas saw during his visit to Hades (tr. Copley, Vergil): “A river of swirling flame flowed all around—Phlegethon, rolling a rubble of grinding rocks.” Other references to this underworld river are found in Vergil Aeneid 6.265; Statius Theb. 4.55; Ovid Met. 5.544; 15.532. The variant Pyriphlegethon is found in Odyssey 10.513; Plato Phaedo 113B; Cicero De nat. deor. 3.43. According to Plato's myth (Phaedo 113E-114B), the curable souls of those in Tartarus who have outraged their parents are carried by the Pyriphlegethon river to the Acherusian lake where they beg forgiveness from those they have wronged. If forgiven, they enter the lake; if not, they are carried back to Tartarus by the fiery river. This punishment is not eternal in Plato, though it is interpreted as such in some Christian apologists (Tertullian Apol. 47.12; Minucius Felix Oct. 35.1; Arnobius 2.14).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1066-1067.]

pictured as a lake of fire.³⁴ On the other hand, fire as an instrument of divine punishment is rather common place in the Jewish background beginning with the Old Testament.³⁵ One would recognize the apocalyptic nature of the idea of fire as depicting endless torments since in a resurrection state its victims are not subject to death and annihilation, but are doomed to be alive for all eternity. Fire stands as the divinely instituted punishment for their evil that inflicts endless pain and torment. The subsequent mentioning of Hell as a lake of fire in later Christian writings is clearly dependent upon these images presented by John in Revelation.³⁶

³⁴“The image is problematical for there are no close parallels in the OT, in Jewish literature, or in Greco-Roman literature, particularly when the place of eternal punishment is conceived of as a λίμνη, ‘lake.’ Surprisingly, the image of a ‘lake of fire’ occurs in ancient Egyptian texts (Book of the Dead 17.40–42; 24.4; 175.15, 20; see Zandee, *Death as an Enemy*, 133–42; “Flammensee,” *Lexikon der Aegyptologie* [Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1977] 2:259–60; H. Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Aegypter* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926] 294–95), where it is located in the underworld. Though the channel of transmission from Egypt to Revelation is unknown, it is instructive to note that another Egyptian underworld myth, ‘the second death’ (see Comment on 20:6), not only is associated with the ‘lake of fire’ in Rev 20:14 and 21:8 but is also found closely connected with the ‘lake of fire’ in the Book of the Dead (see Comment on 20:6). This reinforces the probability that traditional Egyptian underworld mythology has somehow contributed to John’s conception of the underworld.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1065–1066.]

³⁵“The imagery of fire as a means of eternal punishment was a familiar conception during the second temple period. In ancient Israel, the theophanic imagery of the Sinai tradition (Exod 19) included fire as part of a complex of natural phenomena associated with volcanic activity, wind storms, and earthquakes (see Comment on 4:5). Fire continued to be associated with theophanic imagery (Ps 50:3; Ezek 1:4, 13f.), and in particular the metaphor of a ‘stream of fire’ (drawn from volcanic imagery) became associated with mythological depictions of the throne of God (Dan 7:10; 1 Enoch 14:18). The connection of divine judgment with fire (see Comment on 8:7) was common in the OT and early Judaism, and it was but a short step to depict streams of fire pouring down from heaven in judgment (Sib. Or 2.196–205, 286; 3.54, 84–85; 7.120–21; 8:243; Pss. Sol. 15:6–7). Fire in the underworld as a means of eternal punishment is first mentioned in Isa 66:24 and frequently thereafter (1 Enoch 10:6, 13; Matt 5:22; 13:42, 50; 18:9; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48). It became natural to think of the underworld as the site for a river of fire (2 Enoch 10:2), a tradition that continued to be used in Christian underworld mythology (Apoc. Paul 31, 34, 36).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1066.]

³⁶“The specific conception of a lake of fire, when mentioned in early Christian texts (Apoc. Peter [Akhmimic] 23), is clearly dependent on Revelation. The notion of a ‘lake’ or ‘sea’ in the underworld or the heavenly world (Rev 15:2 [see Comment] mentions a heavenly sea, a counterpart to the lake of fire) is part of Greco-Roman underworld mythology (Plato *Phaedo* 113D; Plutarch *De gen. Socr.* 590D; PGM IV.1461–62, *Ἀχερουσίατε λίμνη σΑιδου*, “the Acherusian lake of Hades”; PGM VII.517, *τῆ ἱερᾷ λίμνη τῆ*

Thus John presents believers with a dramatic picture of eternity without God that stands at the destiny of all who opposed God in this life.

End of the followers of the beasts, v. 21. These two human leaders, the two beasts, are cast directly into Hell. But the rest of the evil people in opposition to God on that battlefield are simply killed by the warrior Christ: *καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου τῆ ἐξελευθούσης ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, καὶ πάντα τὰ ὄρνεα ἐχορτάσθησαν ἐκ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτῶν.* *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.*

In the background here stands most likely the apocryphal Psalm of Solomon 17:25 where the Davidic Messiah destroys “the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth.” Also the Dead Sea Scroll document 1Q Rule of the Blessings 5:24–25 (=1Q28) contains, “With your sceptre may you lay waste the earth. With the breath of your lips may you kill the wicked.” The provided John a background image with clear meaning which enabled his readers to grasp his image here. Additionally in Jewish apocalyptic writings of this time the idea of the Messiah destroying the wicked with His sword was common place.³⁷ Of course, none of these Jewish writings envisioned Jesus Christ as the Messiah, but they did establish a framework of understanding for the righteous punishments of the wicked by the Messiah.

The final thought John leaves for his readers is the realization of the ‘massive banquet’ of rotting corpses for the vultures, to which the angel had summoned them in vv. 17–19. Again this plays off Ezek. 39:17 and especially 39:4b, *καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μετὰ σοῦ δοθήσονται εἰς πλήθη ὀρνέων, παντὶ πετεινῷ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς θηρίοις τοῦ πεδίου δέδωκά σε καταβρωθῆναι.* *I will give you to birds of prey of every kind and to the wild animals to be devoured.*

καλουμένη ἀβύσσῳ, “the holy lake which is called Abyss”). The Acherusian lake (originally a river in Epirus that formed a lake on the Acherusian plain in ancient times, where an entrance to Hades was believed to be located) was associated with the Elysian fields, and Jewish and Christian texts mention deliverance from fiery torment to the blessings of the Acherusian lake (Sib. Or 2.334–38; Apoc. Peter 14; Apoc. Paul 22).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1066.]

³⁷“The destruction of the armies opposed to God in the eschatological battle is in accordance with traditions found in Jewish apocalyptic in texts such as 1 Enoch 38:5 (tr. Knibb): ‘Many kings will at that time be destroyed and given into the hand of the righteous and the holy’ (see 1 Enoch 46:4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 40:1). According to CDb 19:10, those who are faithful to God will escape punishment during his visitation, ‘but those that remain shall be delivered up to the sword when there comes the Messiah’ (tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 45).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1067.]

The prophet predicts the grisly downfall of ancient Gog in this prophet vision.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

A careful reading and grasping of the correct meaning of chapter 19 becomes challenging to most modern western Christians. The day of Harmagedon at the end of human history is presented here with such vividness and intensity that it is challenging to take in. Many professing Christians simply reject this possible to happen.

But God has presented this vision to John in apocalyptic vision primarily for a first century Christian readership far more exposed to raw evil in its brute power to harm and destroy than most modern western Christians ever experience. Yet, we live in a day where the unbelievable brutality of evil is becoming more and more real. Many believers in our world -- not just John's world -- are experiencing most of the same things that John's intended readers experienced in the 90s of the first Christian century. To these followers of Christ, the message of Revelation comes through as originally intended, as a message of hope in the justice of an utter holy God to unleash His fury upon evil and all the harm it inflicts upon His people. Evil is doomed; God in His holiness will prevail. And His people -- those who obey Him in their living -- will find in Him refuge and confidence for not only today but also for all eternity. Despite the mocking condemnation of Christ in the world, in the end He will sit upon the white horse of victory over all His enemies.

One strong implication from this very intense picture of end times is a renewed motivation to share our faith in Christ with those around us. Now we clearly understand what is ahead down the road and we should be moved to share the need of Christ with a lost, pagan world all the more. To be sure, as John repeatedly underscored, most of the evil world will reject our witness just as it did the symbolic two witnesses in 11:1-14. But we have their mandate to present Christ to our pagan world! How they respond rests on their shoulders, not ours.