

Revelation Bible Study #45

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 19:11-16

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

Introduction

St. John has begun to point to the ultimate fulfillment of history, the Return of Christ. This great Second Advent, like the Kingdom of God itself, is both a present and future reality for the believer. At this point in Revelation, an “already but not yet” interpretive dynamic overtakes the predominantly typological understanding of the previous chapters. The events of the seals, trumpets and bowls represent things which have happened, are happening and will happen once more; here, however, the Apostle brings up final matters that benefit believers *now*.

Christ has promised to return one day to enact the Final Judgment, which includes destroying all of the wicked before the general Resurrection and judgment of all mankind.¹ This event is to take place after the Church has completed her evangelistic efforts to their greatest possible extent.² Yet the believer must also recognize that the Return is a present reality for them. The origin of the “already but not yet” is found in Heaven being outside of the normal understanding of time, and all the saints in glory are shown in the Throne Room as a present reality when St. John sees them.³ This means that every individual Christian, being united to Christ in their Baptism and thus being where Christ is,⁴ is simultaneously here on earth *and* in the Throne Room watching the events of St. John's vision unfold – including the Second Advent. While our bodies and conscious minds are present on earth, the substance of our spiritual self is in Heaven. It is a similar dynamic to when Christ walked the earth by His human nature, during which time He was simultaneously *everywhere* according to His Divine nature. As to the specific mechanics of this, we must confess that it is both a reality and a mystery, similar in ineffability to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Hypostatic Union.

Accompanying this mystery is this short passage which discusses Christ's titles, nature, and glory before going into the Second Advent proper. It functions as a kind of re-introduction for Jesus. First He is shown in a glorified state that reminds St. John of the Transfiguration;⁵ then Jesus is

¹ Matthew 24

² Acts 1:6-11

³ Revelation 7:9-10

⁴ Romans 6:1-4, Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33, Romans 8:34, Hebrews 1:3, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22

⁵ Revelation 1:9-16

presented as the worthy Lamb who was slain;⁶ *now* however it is time to introduce Christ in the third time as the Word, the conquering King, and He who was once known as “The angel of the Lord.” In a word, more fully telling us Who He is.

Vs.11-13

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The White Horse

St. John sees Christ appear on a white horse to conduct warfare, in a similar fashion to the rider who arrives after the first seal on the Great Scroll is opened.⁷ This does not mean that Christ *is* the rider from the first seal. Christ is shown here with more crowns and with a sword instead of a bow; it is more likely that the white rider pointed to Christ's Return by representing the spread of Christianity. Whereas Jesus showed Himself first in priestly garb at Patmos, then as the slain Lamb, now He appears as a great Conqueror who comes to be *faithful and true* to His promise. Now is the time for the problem of evil to be solved once and for all.

The Secret Name

Christ has a “secret name” that is not so secret. That name is the sacred Name of God (typically represented by the Tetragrammaton, or יהוה) pointing to Christ's former activities as the “Angel of the Lord.” When Moses receives instructions from our Lord concerning various laws, God includes a promise about the conquest of Canaan:

Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

*Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for **My Name is in him**. But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.*⁸

The angel of the Lord has the power to forgive the sins of men or withhold forgiveness, just as Christ demonstrates in His earthly ministry.⁹ God's Name is in him, just as it is with Christ. And the angel of the Lord goes with God's people to engage in conquest against God's enemies, just as Christ is portrayed doing at His Return. Zechariah even *calls* them the same Being.¹⁰ The two are clearly the same figure; whenever one reads about “The Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament, it is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ.

The Word

St. John also calls our Savior the Word of God. This is in keeping with his identification of Christ as the Logos, or Word, in his Gospel.¹¹ Typically commentaries will compare St. John's use of the term with that of ancient Greek and Stoic philosophers (especially the Presocratic thinker Heraclitus, concluding that the Apostle concurred with their presuppositions and only modified the idea to match Christ's identity.¹² Thus the presuppositions of these philosophies are unfortunately imported into the term when St. John clearly did not intend to do so.

⁶ Revelation 5:6-10

⁷ Revelation 6:1-2

⁸ Exodus 23:20-22

⁹ Mark 2:1-12

¹⁰ Zechariah 12:8

¹¹ John 1:1-14

¹² <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm>

The standard line of thinking is that, somehow, the Apostle got his hands on Greek pagan philosophical concepts and decided “yes, this is correct.” He then decided to utilize that language to describe Jesus's functions according to His Divinity as the Second Person of the Trinity. How exactly a fisherman from Galilee was supposed to become a scholar of Greek thought is difficult to countenance. It is far more likely that St. John uses the term Logos in reference to the Old Testament practice of referring to the Word as a *Divine Person*. Moses records the Word appearing to Abraham in a vision;¹³ laws in Numbers refer to the Word as someone whose commandment could be broken;¹⁴ 1 Samuel records a period of time in which the Word was rare, and that meant “there was no frequent vision,”¹⁵ but then the Word of the Lord *appears* at Shiloh to Samuel;¹⁶ Nathan condemns David for doing evil in the sight of the Word of the Lord.¹⁷ While there are certainly times in which the term “The Word of the Lord” is used in reference to oracles or mere messages,¹⁸ there is a consistent sense in which an individual appears to men *with that title*, and He happens to be Divine.

The significance of this title in light of Christ's Return is immeasurable. St. John says that Christ is the mighty warrior King, in whom is God's Name with full sanction to conduct conquest on behalf of His people. But over the course of this passage He is also called the Word, signifying that He comes to humanity once more for the open communication with men that once happened in Old Testament times. While men have certainly had their encounters with the supernatural at various and sundry places in the Church era, for the past two thousand years it has not been the case that people *expect* to speak with the Word of God face to face as they once did.

This is *not* to say that Christ has been absent from the Church all this time. After all, Christ told the Apostles (and through them all the Church) “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”¹⁹ St. John himself wrote that Christ arriving in the flesh is a true confession.²⁰ The *already* aspect of Christ's Return is found in the matter of the Real Presence in the Eucharist, in the indwelling of God with believers, and in union with Christ through Baptism; the *not yet* is found in our waiting for His reinstating of dwelling among men as He did during His earthly ministry and in the era of the prophets.

Vs.14-16

14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. **15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. **16** On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Here our Lord confirms the prophecy of Enoch as related in the Book of Jude. Jude, quoting from Enoch, states:

*“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”*²¹

Christ's army is arrayed in the deeds of the saints,²² and their riding white horses demonstrates their being remade fully in His image. They conquer with Him, for they have been made like Him. Since St.

¹³ Genesis 15:1-5

¹⁴ Numbers 15:29-31

¹⁵ 1 Samuel 3:1-10

¹⁶ 1 Samuel 3:21

¹⁷ 2 Samuel 12:9

¹⁸ E.g., 1 Kings 12:24

¹⁹ Matthew 28:20

²⁰ 1 John 4:2. St. John writes using the perfect participle ἐλθούσα for “having come.”

²¹ Jude vs.14-15

²² Revelation 19:8b

John has related many promises of future co-rulership between Christ and the Saints (with Christ taking preeminence of course), this includes being part of the conquest the same way that the Israelites followed Joshua into the Promised Land.

While this passage is a recapitulation of and expansion on the previous vision of Judgment Day,²³ the emphasis here is on Judgment Day as it actually is, namely that of a true and material conquest of the world by Jesus Himself, completing the picture first given by Joshua's entrance into the Promised Land. The Conquest of Canaan is a type of the Second Advent, at least in connection to the final moments before the final judgment. One key difference remains though, in that while the Israelites did the fight for Joshua, when Jesus returns He will do the fighting for the Church. The sword which comes from His mouth, the Word,²⁴ shall slay His enemies without the accompanying armies of Heaven even having to fight. Not only in conquest, but also in terms of punishment; because He has already experienced the wrath of God at the Cross (and thus wearing a cloak dipped in His own Blood), Christ is the One who treads the winepress of wrath, not the believers. While Revelation promises co-rulership with Christ at the Resurrection, He still has authority over all things.

It also appears that Jesus has a tattoo on His leg. The Apostle sees the name written on Christ's thigh because Jesus has girded His loins for the battle. The title "King of kings and Lord of lords" shows total authority in Heaven and on Earth. It is also a title which had been pronounced in its full form first by St. Paul, so this is a confirmation that the Church had taken up a legitimate *nom de guerre*.²⁵ Everything in the universe will belong to Jesus. The latter title, "Lord of lords," is translated from *Kyrios*, a title often given to God. It would not be illegitimate to translate it as "God of gods," a title given to the true God a number of times in the Old Testament.²⁶ This is, of course, a present reality as well. St. John has already spoken of Christ as being the ruler of the princes on earth, and Christ has declared His authority in Heaven as well as earth.²⁷ But the *not yet* is found in the complete revealing of His Divine authority and power, and for Him to assert it against all rebels both in the physical and spiritual realms.

23 Revelation 14:14-20

24 Hebrews 4:12

25 1 Timothy 6:15

26 Deuteronomy 10:17, Psalm 136:2, Daniel 2:47, Daniel 11:36

27 Revelation 1:5, Matthew 28:18