

Revelation 19: "The Return of the King"

A STUDY

REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Introduction

This week's study will be from one of the Apostle John's writings: 'The Book of Revelation'. Many of us are going to see or have seen the third installment in the 'Lord of the Rings' trilogy this Christmas season. Since the third installment is entitled 'Return of the King', I thought it would be appropriate to look at the Bible's revelation to us of the ultimate and consummate Return of the King: King Jesus!

The study will focus on Revelation chapter 19, specifically verses 11-16 that reveals to us the armies of heaven led by Our Supreme Commander, Jesus Christ the King! Much of the apocalyptic imagery that Tolkien used in his wonderful stories derived from an imagination that had been captured and enriched with Biblical imagery such as revealed in Revelation 19. In fact, the 'Lord of the Rings' trilogy can actually help us to interpret more accurately, and give us a helpful reading strategy for reading the 'Book of Revelation' as we will discuss below.

Revelation 19: After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ²for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." ³Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." ⁴And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" ⁵And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." ⁶Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." ¹⁰Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

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.

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done 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 slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Blessing not a Mystery

The Apostle Paul in his letter to his disciple Timothy, reminds him that those who want to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). In the gospels, the Lord Jesus Christ tells his disciples that after his death they will be afflicted, handed over to be judged and put to death on account of his name (Mt. 24:9ff; Mk. 13:9). In addition, he comforts them by saying that although in this world his disciples will have tribulation, nevertheless they are to rejoice, for he has overcome the world (John 16:33).

For the saints of every generation, there is no other book that claims God's blessing for the remembrance of these truths than the Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. In this book, the Lord reveals through his angel to the churches the message to "overcome," continue to be faithful in spite of your circumstances, because God is sovereign, the Ruler of all History (Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:7). All history will fulfill God's good and righteous purposes for his glory and on behalf of his people (Rom. 8:28-39).

Although the Book of Revelation is founded upon historical circumstances in the Roman Empire, addressed to seven particular historical churches (Rev. 1-3), there is wisdom and encouragement for all the saints in every period of the last days before Christ returns. In the Book of Revelation, we not only see the triumph of God's purposes and power, but the great and powerful coming of our Lord and King Jesus Christ- - this is the church's great hope!

The book powerfully lifts the eyes of the saints to see above the problems and afflictions of this world. In order that we may know God's perspective

on circumstances in our lives; that is, to see God and his sovereignty; the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the saints who have been bought with the precious blood of Christ are now ruling with Christ; to see the devil, sin and death are conquered ultimately, and the Lord Jesus Christ is lifted upon his throne and all his enemies are made to be his footstool (1 Peter 1:3-18; cf. Rev. 4-5). This book is a blessing for those who read it (Rev. 1:3; 22:7,14)!

Because of the great imagery and apocalyptic style of the book, it is not surprising that many in the church have misunderstood Revelation and gotten lost in the details, and have failed to find the great encouragement of our God; that is, his glorious reign and defeat of all his enemies and the Lord being brought near to his people, to be in the presence of his people forever (cf. Rev. 21:1ff)!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Recapitulation not a Chronological Account

In approaching the Book of Revelation as literature, we must remember that recapitulation is the key to a clearer understanding of the book as a whole. This means that the structure of Revelation does not relate consecutive events but frequently cover the same ground in cycles from different, progressive and escalating perspectives.

Dr. Leland Ryken has written that "the action [in the Book of Revelation] has the sense of progression and climax that we associate with stories, with the conquest of evil occurring in incremental stages until it is finally and totally complete" (Ryken, Longman; 458). He adds that there is "a spiral of sevenfold visions that recapitulate and intensify each other and end with a tremendous sense of final judgment and redemption" (Ryken, Longman; 466; see also Poythress, 3.8ff). These issues are important to keep in mind to fully understand the book as God has given it to John to teach the churches in every age.

It could be suggested that as one reads the 'Lord of the Rings' trilogy, so one should read the 'Book of Revelation'.

[Note: Lord of the Rings is a fictional story, Revelation is a revelation, inspired of God, yet we can use the same reading strategy to see the conflict of good and evil, and how ultimately evil is overcome by the meek and the meek inherit the earth].

Our passage in Revelation 19:14-16 is one of the climatic events of all the Scripture. Since the book should be interpreted in light of recapitulation, these verses record the consummate intensification and escalation of the

ultimate triumph of Christ that is also recorded in Revelation chapter 20:7-10. These events from 19:11-20:10 are not to be interpreted chronologically, but they are to be understood as the ultimate salvation of God's people and judgment of the wicked.

Prof. G. K. Beale says concerning Revelation 19:14-16, that it is "the most expanded description of Christ's defeat and judgment of the ungodly forces at the end of history" (Beale, 948). Not only is it what the prophets looked forward to and sought to understand (1 Pet. 1:10,11), but it is the fulfillment of Christ and his Kingdom from every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation (Rev. 5:9; 14:6).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Christophany of the Divine Warrior

This passage also describes the ultimate appearing of our great God and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate Theophany (God appearance) of our God who reigns forevermore. These verses follow the great conquest of the Lord over the enemies of his people in chapters 17 and 18: the anti-Christian trinity: the triumvirate of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet.

In these verses, all of the prophets, Christ himself and the NT writers find fulfillment in the hope of our ultimate salvation in Christ. Verses 14-16 fall within the pericope of John's total vision that begins in 19:11, when we notice the words: "and I saw" which also begin other significant passages such as Rev. 1:7; 4:11; 5:1,2; 6:1; 7:2; 8:2,13; 14:1,6,14; 17:3.

It is important to note that these passages which begin with "and I saw" are normally at the beginning of each vision and are usually heavenly visions which God is revealing to John. What John sees points the eyes of all the saints to look up into heaven and see God's sovereign rule and the fulfillment of his promises (Beale, Introduction).

This vision of John in these verses is the escalating and progressively advanced defeat of God's enemies and those who have disobeyed his commands. Those who did not repent at the mercy and patience of the Lord, although they knew of their sins and that they were in cosmic rebellion against a holy God. Instead, they suppressed the truth, exchanged it for a lie and God gave them over to follow the Beast and the False Prophet- -the ultimate exchanging the truth for a lie (Romans 1:18-3:20; cf. 2 Thess. 2:11-12).

From the description of Christ in these passages there is great hope for a suffering and persecuted church throughout the ages since the ascension of Christ; there is revealed here the focus we should all have as pilgrim

saints living in a foreign world. It is hope for those who have a heavenly city, who look forward to a better world and do not call this world their home (Heb. 12:18-29). On the other hand, it is a stark and descriptive warning for those who take lightly God's commands; who trample the Son of God underfoot and who every day resist the truth of what God has revealed to them (cf. Heb. 10:39). To them, this is a perfectly terrifying and poignant call to them to repent! To the wicked, this is the most dreadful day they could ever imagine.

For at this moment, those who do not trust by faith in the righteousness found only in the Lord Jesus Christ, are under the wrath of God (cf. John 3:36; 2 Peter 2:3-4). This is the wrath of God the NT authors spoke of that was to come (Mt. 3:7; cf. Mk. 1:3-8; Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Rom. 2:5; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6).

Before proceeding to the verses of Revelation 19:14-16, the people of God should consider this passage in light of the teaching in the OT and the NT concerning the Day of the LORD, and the ultimate Theophanic judgment of God. A Theophany, or appearing of God was manifested in many different ways (Poythress, 6.1ff; Kline, chap. 1), but in these verses we see the ultimate "Warrior Theophany" found in the OT as Christ comes to judge the wicked and to save his people (Zech. 9:14-15; 14:3-5; Hab. 3:3-15; Is. 63:1-6; 59:17-19; Zeph. 3:17; Josh. 5:13-15; cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2).

In other words, the ultimate Theophany is revealed as a ***Christophany***. In the OT, particularly in the "Minor Prophets" we see this theme of the Day of the LORD revealed albeit proleptically, but prophetically; here in the Book of Revelation we see it in its eschatological consummation. The Prophet Joel warns Israel about the coming Day of the LORD:

"For strong is the One who executes his word. For the Day of the LORD is great and terrible; who can endure it?" (Joel 2:11).

The Prophet Amos warns the wicked who look to the Day of the LORD:

"Woe to you who desire the Day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness and not light..." (Amos 5:18).

The Prophet Malachi tells of the great Day of God in chapter four of his prophecy:

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up...That will leave them neither root nor

branch...but to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings...you shall trample the wicked, for they shall be as ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this" (Mal. 4:1-3).

This vision of the Day of the LORD was not lost in the writings of the NT, for the NT author's described such a day as well. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, the Apostle Paul describes the wrath that is to come; in 4:15, Paul speaks of the coming of the Lord. In Romans 2:5, he describes this day as "the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

The Apostle Peter writes in his epistle of the "day of judgment" in 2 Peter 2:9 and 3:7; the "day of the LORD" in 2 Peter 3:10 and in 2 Peter 3:12, he describes this same day as "the coming day of God." Throughout the OT and the NT, the Day of the LORD pointed to a day of vengeance and great Theophanic calamity when Christ would appear a second time for judgment (1 Thess. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-8; 2 Tim. 4:1). This was the day that the world would be cleansed of the wicked, the righteous would come into everlasting fellowship with God in his presence, and Jesus Christ would set up his Eternal Kingdom (Hos. 2:19-23; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:14,15; Obadiah 17-21; Hab. 3:18; Zeph. 3:17-20; Zech. 14:20,21).

We also need to approach these verses with the understanding of the Divine Warrior motif from the OT (Longman; Reid). In the OT, God is described as the LORD of heaven and earth that defeats the enemies of God's people (Ex. 15; Deut. 4; Joshua 24; Judges 6). Here in the passage from Revelation 19:14-16 we see the Divine Christ, the one like the Son of Man from Daniel 7, who is coming in judgment upon the enemies of God. Whereas the people of God in the OT were told to "fear not for the LORD will fight for you," here we see that the saints are clothed in Christ's righteousness no longer with fears, and they come with Christ in his great judgment while his wrath consumes the whole earth.

While all the saints of Christ have no reason to fear, the wicked must be warned of this great Day that is coming and turn from their wicked ways to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from the coming wrath. If the judgment of God upon the world in the flood (Gen. 6-9); upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:1ff); the judgment upon Egypt and Pharaoh (Ex. 14; 15); and the judgments upon the nations and even Israel were increasingly horrible, how much more will the Day of Christ's wrath be when he consumes the world in his anger because they have suppressed the truth of his revelation (cf. Luke 13:1ff; 2 Peter 2:4-10).

Jesus and the Armies of Heaven: Revelation 19:14

In Revelation 19:14 we read that the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed Christ on white horses. Some commentators think that the armies of heaven refers to the holy and heavenly angels that surround God's throne (Ladd, 255). However, in this context of the Book of Revelation, this army of heaven is Christ's faithful saints- - those who were faithful to follow him to the end; those who fought the good fight and ran the race to the end, persevering with eyes on the Author and Perfector of their faith (Heb. 12:1,2).

In other parts of Revelation we see these saints in John's vision who are redeemed and in the presence of God ruling with Christ. These saints are those who have overcome (2:26,27; 3:21; 4:2-4,9-11; 5:11-14; 7:4-10 (cf. 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 19:1-8; 20:4-6). Although Jesus told his disciples prior to his ascension that he would return with his holy angels to judge the nations (Mt. 13:40-42; 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31-32; Mk. 8:38; 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude 14-15), this is not contradictory. Christ will appear with his holy angels, but Revelation 17:14 says that "those who are with him," are his saints.

In Revelation, only the saints are described as having white garments (3:4-5,18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13-14), except for one exception in 15:6 (Beale, 960). The Lord will return with his holy angels on the Day of Judgment, but in this passage, the hope communicated by God to his people is that they will also be with him and the angels when they come!

These saints are said to wear pure garments. There are other passages in Revelation that speak of this as well (Rev. 3:4,18; 6:11; 7:9-17; 15:5-8; cf. Harlot's clothing: 17:4; 18:16-17). These are those saints who have the wedding garment on who are prepared as a Bride for Christ and have been made ready for the wedding supper of the Lamb (Mt. 22:1-14; cf. Eph. 5:23ff).

Revelation 19:7-8 tells us prior to these verses that because of the defeat of the archenemy of God- - Babylon the Great, in chapter 18, the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. In verse 8 the bride, the saints of Christ are described clothed with bright, pure, fine linen which symbolizes the righteous deeds of the saints. This refers negatively to the saints not giving loyalty to Babylon, but positively, it refers to the testimony of the saints to Jesus in word and deed (1:9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11,17; 20:4) (Beale, 934). The saints are rewarded for their faithfulness to Christ and perseverance in the faith (cf. 2 Tim. 2:11-13; 4:7-8).

God has justified them by his grace through faith and in their lives they truly witnessed to the world in their "righteous deeds" that they

belonged to God (Eph. 2:6-10; Phil. 2:12,13; Rev. 2-3: "to him that overcomes...").

In Isaiah 61:10, the prophet foretells what is to come for the people of God when he declares:

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels."

In Revelation, with the consummation of Christ's judgment and righteousness, we see the saints adorned just as Isaiah had prophesied. In contrast, we should notice the comparison of the saints' clothing to the description of the harlot in chapter 17:3-5:

"...And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication..."

What a great contrast between the rich garments of the evil harlot and the pure and righteous adornment of the saints vindicated by Christ's righteousness. In the eyes of fallen men, those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, the harlot is dressed as many in our society wish to dress. They desire to show their status and riches in the world, but according to Revelation chapter 17, this is a heinous and ugly attire. It is the attire described of those who are trusting in their own righteousness and those who have loved the world and all the evil behind the world system.

As Christians, we are taught not to love the ways of the world- -including dress, and the Apostle James warns us not to judge others on their clothing (1 John 2:15-17; cf. James 2:1-7; 1 Pet. 3:2-6). The clothing of the world system described in Revelation 17 is the clothing of the followers of the evil triumvirate: the Dragon, Beast and False Prophet. In Zechariah 3:3-5, there is a vision of Joshua clothed with filthy garments and he is clothed in rich robes and a clean turban is placed upon his head and clothes are put upon him because God has removed his iniquity from him. This is another OT example of the importance of the pure garments that the Lord provides for his saints by his own righteousness and the hope this verse should give to every generation of the church.

The saints are wearing wedding garments, but additionally, according to other verses, it seems that they are some kind of priestly wedding garments. This vision could teach the people of God that they are clothed

in Christ's righteousness ultimately because they have been identified and vindicated by Christ their High Priest (Heb. 2:14-18; 5:1ff). Notice how Christ and the angels are described in the Scripture as wearing these white priestly garments (Rev. 1:13; 15:6; Dan. 10:5; 12:6; Ez. 9:2).

These garments identify the Christ's saints as not only the Bride of Christ, but Priests of Christ and God the Father- - a holy nation, a royal priesthood (Ex. 28:42; Lev. 16:4; 1 Pet. 2:5,9). These garments probably reflect the glory of the One and only True High Priest, and because of the saints' identification with Jesus the High Priest, they are adorned just like he and the angels in God's resplendent glory (cf. Dan. 12:3; Mt. 5:14; 2 Cor. 3:18).

The white horses on which they ride are symbols of their pure identification with Christ's righteousness; their identification with Christ's death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. The Apostle Paul writes in his epistle to the Colossians:

"For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).

Christ's work enabled these saints to be seated with Christ in the heavenlies and although upon earth it was not manifested, in reality this is the way God saw them: being remade pure in Christ's image (Col. 3:1-4; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18ff). This is significant for the way the saints perceive themselves presently in Christ. As the Apostle John says in his first epistle,

"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-4).

The saints of all time, in every age should be encouraged to this final and climatic appearing of the Lord Jesus with his people. All those who fought against them and hated them in this life, will see them with eyes of hatred and jealousy along with Jesus, and the saints will be vindicated before all the wicked world to be seen associated with He who they witnessed faithfully all of their lives.

Christ has redeemed his people by his death and resurrection on their behalf. He has taken from them their guilt and reconciled his people to God (2 Cor. 5:11-21). God is pleased to be their God and he makes them disciples and works in them to do God's commands. God is our true redeemer in Christ, who although he had no sin became a sin offering for

us, so that we might be the righteousness of God in him. The Apostle Paul refers to the saints' status as being *in Christ* in many of his letters and this is to help us to understand that not only are we clothed in Christ's righteousness and sheltered from the wrath of God, we are identified with his perfect Person and Work on our behalf thus making us truly righteous (Rom. 5:8-10; Heb. 2:14-18; 4:16-18).

This is a wonderful vision for God to give to bless and encourage the church throughout the ages in difficult times, for it is here that we are to identify ourselves -- as Overcomers in Jesus!

John starkly contrasts Christ's righteous army of saints with the Beast's army and his followers (9:15-19; 12:17; 13:7; 16:16). This is no "hellish" army who is allowed to fight against the saints in order to strengthen them and give glory to God, but Christ's army of those who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (Rev. 4:5). This army is pure and unadulterated, it is not unrighteous and unjust, but righteous and just in the judgments which it brings.

The Lord is slow concerning his anger and wrath, he is a consuming fire and although the wicked had been warned, they continually lived in disobedience to God and the Lamb and they sought one last time to try and overcome the Christ of God and his people; but they will fail. This is the hope for those in the church who are suffering, who cry out "How long, O LORD?" and ask "Why do the nations rage and the enemies of God seem to advance and prosper?" (Ps. 2; 37). As we turn to Revelation 19:15, these perennial questions are answered with the hope in the Coming of the LORD Jesus Christ.

This is the ultimate answer to the perennial "Problem of Evil"!

The Wrath of Messiah: Revelation 19:15

Revelation 19:15 describes Jesus with a sharp sword proceeding from his mouth to smite the wicked nations. It continues that he will rule them with a rod of iron and he will tread the winepress of the fury of the Wrath of God the Almighty. In considering this verse, we ought to look at other passages in Revelation that describe this ultimate and climatic Christophany, or appearance of Christ (Rev. 1:12-16; 2:12,16; 14:14-16 ("one like the Son of Man"; Dan. 7:13ff); 20:11-15).

This is the resurrected Son of God, the Great King who is coming in final judgment upon those who have rejected he and his people. The OT and NT warned the wicked and unbelieving of this great and terrible day (Isaiah; Jeremiah; Daniel; Ezekiel; Amos; Joel; Zephaniah; Malachi).

Although cycles of judgment have been described in Revelation up to this point, they are described as progressively getting closer to the end and escalating in severity. Here is the ultimate Day of Wrath spoken of throughout the Bible. Here is the Messiah for which the Israelite's hoped, who is finally setting up his Eternal Kingdom and destroying the wicked; this is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to his servant David (2 Sam. 7:4-17).

Consider the sharp sword proceeding from out of his mouth. The sword is that of the Divine Warrior who conquers his enemies and the enemies of his people. The sword is a symbol of perfect and righteous judgement that will be pronounced upon all the world (Ps. 7:12; Is. 34:6; Jer. 12:12; cf. Rev. 1:16). This is the Day of weeping and mourning, the ultimate Day when men will pray for the rocks to fall upon them to save them from the wrath of God Almighty in Christ (Rev. 6). This is Christ coming like a "thief" who promised he was "coming soon" to those who were watching for his appearing (3:3; 16:15; 22:7,12).

But there are also other portions of Scripture that describe this sword that is proceeding out of his mouth. In Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Servant of the LORD, Isaiah proclaims that God has made the Servant's mouth like a sharp sword (Is. 49:2). In verse 3, the LORD says through Isaiah that his Servant will glorify the LORD with his work. Throughout Scripture the metaphor of the sword has also been used to speak of God's Word as it is revealed in its power (Eph. 6:12; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16). The passage in verse 15 is a passage about Christ's judgment, but his judgment with God's word. This is the word of God that brought order from chaos in Genesis 1:1 that shows us that John is here identifying Christ as both the Creator and Judge of all things; that is, the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8,11; 21:6; 22:13; cf. John 1:3; Heb. 1:2; 12:1,2).

This is the word of power that has been revealed to all men that speak of his coming judgment and of his grace and mercy in Christ. It is this sword, the word of God that will smite the nations. But it is not just the word of God, but the word of God in judgment for he rules with a rod of iron. This means that although he will smite the nations with the word, he will rule or reign with a rod of iron. For a better understanding of "rod of iron" we should turn to Isaiah 11:4.

In Isaiah 11:4, there is a description of the LORD's Messiah to come. In verse 4, Isaiah describes the Messiah:

"His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor (cf. Mt. 5:3-10), 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 slay the wicked" (cf. 2 Thess. 2:8).

The Messiah will conquer by his word because although it brings good tidings to those who are poor and humble, it brings judgment upon those who do not believe (cf. Is. 61:1; Lk. 4:16ff). There have been many kings and judgments in the world, but this is God's grand climatic judgment of the world for their disobedience to his only begotten Son. In fact when Christ was being judged before both the Jews and the Romans as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, he knows that his sentence of death is sure. But when he is asked if he is truly the Christ of God, he predicts and pronounces an eschatological and ultimate judgment upon both Jews and Gentiles: "...You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (cf. Luke 22:69; Matt. 27:37; Luke 23:24ff; John 18:35ff; 19:12-16).

Christ clearly reveals himself in this passage as the Messiah and the Son of Man who is foretold in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 7:13ff). Although Jesus' disciples had hoped and expected him to set up his Messianic Kingdom immediately, God in his wisdom had a more progressive revealing of how Messiah's Kingdom would be established (Dan. 2:44,45; 7:9-14; Mt. 24:1-3; Acts 1:6ff).

In Psalm 2, the Psalmist writes of the LORD's Messiah and asks: "Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed..."(Ps.2:1-2). This passage gives hope to the church in the OT as our passage gives to us in Revelation. Although the wicked seem to be advancing against God's purposes and his people, the LORD has established his Messiah on his holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6). The LORD laughs at the wicked and their attempts to thwart his will throughout history (Ps. 2:4), and the LORD will speak to them in His wrath (Ps. 2:5).

The wicked may plot and be allowed by the Sovereign God to afflict his people, but their time is short and the LORD has appointed His Messiah to inherit the nations as his inheritance - and all the ends of the earth (Ps. 2:8). The Psalmist foretells that the Messiah will break the wicked with a rod of iron and dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. 2:9). This is the ultimate vision and climatic event that God reveals to his people in the Book of Revelation. The Psalmist ends by warning the wicked to repent and serve the LORD lest the Son be angry and they perish. He says, "When his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him" (Ps. 2:12).

This is not only the great OT warning to the wicked, to those who would plot against the LORD and his people, but the great hope for those who have put their trust in the LORD's Messiah. It is because of this hope that the Book of Revelation announces: "Blessed are those who read the prophecies in this book." Those who trust in the LORD and believe his word that is like a sharp sword, know that this is not a hypothetical warning for the wicked, but it is as sure as the word of the Lord that abides forever (1 Peter 1:24-25; cf. Is. 40:6-9).

Considering the wrath that has been described in previous cycles in John's visions, consider the seals (6:1-17; 8:1-5); the trumpets (8:6-11:19); the bowls and the seven angels (15:1,5-8), and other displays of God's wrath that causes the enemies' hearts to harden and they do not repent although they had been warned numerous times (11:19; 14:9-11; 17-21; 18:3-6,8; 19:2). Those judgments were great but are incomparable to this great judgment of the Lamb. For he comes with a sword.

God's wrath has not been displayed in this way since the cross of Christ. The wrath upon Christ on the cross was the great climax and display of God's wrath that had been stored up for ages in the Godhead. In God's anger and love, he poured out his wrath upon Christ who bore up in himself the pollution and guilt and punishment for the sins of his people. Those who turn away from such a display of God's goodness, mercy and wrath are to be pitied. The foolish- - the wicked- - are storing up for themselves wrath on the Day of Wrath when God will ultimately judge them by the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 2:5ff).

In Christ's coming we see the Lamb of God suffering by crucifixion and taking upon himself the wrath of God, but in Revelation 19:11ff, we see not the lowly Lamb of God suffering upon a Roman cross, but the Christ of Glory coming with those he has redeemed to enact judgment for all the world- - for all those who do not know him! The way he is described should encourage the believing, but those who have suppressed the truth, they must be warned! If they thought the wrath of the cross of God Almighty was terrible and frightening, they have seen nothing as great as the Wrath of the LORD of lords and the King of kings coming one final time to judge them. God's judgment is so frightening, John in Revelation uses the imagery of Christ treading the winepress of God's fury.

Concerning the imagery of the winepress and Christ clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood (19:13). Here is the picture of the ultimate wrath of God revealed in the Christ the Divine Warrior. In Isaiah's prophecy chapter 63:2ff, the prophet describes the Divine Warrior, or God who establishes his reign over his enemies (cf. Is. 13:4; 31:4; 42:13; Ezek. 38-39; Joel 3; Zech. 14:3). In verse 2 the prophet writes:

"Why is thy apparel red, and thy garments like his that treads the wine press? I have trodden the winepress along, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption has come."

To better understand this ultimate day of Christ trampling the winepress of God's anger we should compare these passages to Luke 4:18ff when Christ read from the scroll of Isaiah 61:1ff. Christ proclaimed that on the day he was reading from the scroll the prophecy of Isaiah had been fulfilled, however, he left off the last line of Isaiah's prophecy intentionally.

Although in Christ's first coming he would bring deliverance to the captives and salvation for those looking with repentant hearts to God, proclaiming the year of the LORD's favor, in his appearing the second time (here revealed in John's vision), he would finish the statement: **"...and the vengeance of our God"** (cf. Rev. 14:19). Although we must understand that Christ's first coming was to bring salvation, but for those who have rejected him there is nothing left but the day of vengeance and wrath. This shows two things: first, that Christ's work was to be fulfilled progressively as revealed in the gospels, particularly the parables of Jesus (Mt. 13:1-51); secondly, that Christ is slow to anger and wrath, he will patient wanting all to come to him and find forgiveness. However, once he is revealed as in John's vision, it will be a day of darkness and wrath.

In Revelation 19:14-16, the saints come with Jesus in his revelation because Christ drank the cup of wrath on the cross on behalf of his people. Though he had prayed that the cup might pass because it was so awesome and terrible, he nevertheless submitted his will to the Father so that the salvation of his people might be accomplished.

It was God who was saving us from God; that is, God was saving his people from his wrath.

Romans 4:24-26 teaches us that God is just in regards to his righteous judgment, but the justifier of those who believe in Christ Jesus. Therefore the saints should rejoice in seeing that indeed nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus because he has loved them with a divine and intimate love displayed in the cross when Jesus became a propitiation for the sins of his people and expiated God's wrath and fury which all sinful men deserve.

This wrath of God which was expiated at the cross for those who believe is yet to be displayed and there will be no mediator between the wicked and God on the Day of his Great Judgment. They will be cut off to perish

in darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. All of their hopes of overcoming God's Messiah, all the hopes of persecuting and defeating the people of God will be dashed immediately upon the rocks to which they look for shelter. This vision should encourage the church to know that it is true that the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church, Christ's people (cf. Mt. 16:18-19).

The Return of the King of kings and Lord of lords: Revelation 19:16

In Revelation 19:16 we see on Christ's robe and his thigh a name which is King of kings, and Lord of lords. This is the title of God himself throughout Scripture (Isaiah 40-46). This shows Christ's deity and relationship as one with, but distinct from the Father (cf. John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15ff). Christ himself is the ultimate King and Lord of all. Philippians 2:5-11 teaches us that Christ became man and was obedient unto death so that God gave him a name which is above every name- - so that at his feet every tongue will confess that Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (cf. Is. 45:23).

Christ has many names but the name of the Messiah, the Anointed One, the hope of Israel in verse 15 is also the King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ who was also one like the Son of Man, is also the Great King and Lord God (2 Samuel 7:14ff; Dan. 2:44,45; cf. Is. 52-53). This name of the Messiah is the name that had been revealed as "wonderful" (Judges 13); "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6); and all the wisdom and power in Christ's names are described here consummately as the King of kings and LORD of lords.

John reveals to the churches that Christ is the conqueror of all their enemies and the Lord has made all his enemies to be a footstool for him. This is not the wrath of a God who is like a man, who bursts out in hatred and anger, but a God who was patient, who warned, who did not want any to perish but for all to come to repentance. This Christ who is coming to judge on behalf of his Father has been merciful to all of creation and they have rejected him in his life and work. The Creator of every man is now confronting sinful man one last time with the ultimate judgment that every sinner deserves.

Christ is ruler and the consummation of all of history. God rules all of creation in Christ and Christ comes one last time to defeat the death and offer up his kingdom to his God and Father (1 Cor. 15:27). This is the last in the cycles of judgment that consummates in his Great Appearing before all the world to see. All of those who denied him, all of those who said they did not believe, will find that they were terribly wrong. All of those who persecuted the saints and thought of them as weak and not worthy of

dignity, will see them on this day clothed in Christ's righteousness, in great dignity wearing Christ's priestly robes.

For these saints who are coming with Christ are a holy priesthood, a royal nation and although that is what they have always been because of Christ, now the world will confess it and they will be vindicated before the enemies of Christ and God. What a revelation that God has given through Christ and his angel to the Apostle John! This should encourage every saint in every age- -those who have believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Their day is coming! "Vengeance is mine," the Lord has said, and so it is. Fear the Lord you his saints, for you who fear the Lord lack no good thing.

Although times can look bleak and dismal, there is always the blessed Book of Revelation to reveal the ending of all of God's history. However it may look at times for the church who is persecuted and are humbled in this world, God has overcome the world. When the church reads these blessed verses and prays the Lord's prayer, now we know the hope that is to come when we pray "Thy Kingdom come" because it most assuredly will; surely as Christ is God, he will keep his promises that he has made to his people. He will comfort them and make all things new, he is indeed preparing a place for his people (John 14) and there we will be with the Lord in his presence forever (Rev. 21).

This is the great paradox of history. Although throughout the ages it seemed like the wicked were prospering and God's people were being cast down and forsaken; no matter how long the Lord in his wisdom and good timing allowed to pass for his return, the truth is that he will return victoriously for his saints. God chastises his people, makes them perfect through their sufferings so that they may be perfect and conformed to the True Image of God in Christ. God's purpose in pain and suffering finally rids the world of the so-called theodicy of God allowing evil to exist in the world. For in these verses, the people of God have their great hope revealed in Christ the conqueror coming with his people to take vengeance upon all the wicked and the wrongdoing which they enacted against God and his people.

What a vindication! What a judgment! What a Christ that he should love us, not that we loved him first, but that he loved us so much as to make a propitiation of his Son and save some from his wrath. On that day when the heavens open and Christ shall be revealed, then men will see Christ and the saints as they truly are! They will wish that they had listened and obeyed the testimony of their words that confessed and told of the Christ and his great crucifixion and resurrection, but it will be too late.

Although God's law revealed all men as fallen, they did not acknowledge God's reign and his sovereignty. Instead, they fought against the Lord and

his people by the power of the prince of the power of the air. That power which they could see and feel in this world, will be the power and wrath of God they will feel eternally in the next. No, although they will be shut off from the presence of the Lord's favor, they will not be shut off from the presence of the Lord's wrath eternally. These wicked unbelievers, idolaters, and every other conceivable wickedness will be judged on that Final Day when the Christ appears with his people from heaven.

The Book of Revelation should teach us that God's judgment is sure because he has judged his Son; those who disbelieve presently already have the judgment of God upon them (John 3:36). While the church tries to be patient with these brethren who misunderstand God's word, they should be warned of calling God "unfair" in any way. The Book of Revelation teaches us of God's patient and mercy as he displays his wrath in escalating severity until his final judgment with Christ on his white horse. This escalating severity of God's judgment should lead men to repentance now, today (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1,2), because God has given us the Book of Revelation to bless us in our lives, not after our deaths. After our deaths, there is no hope of salvation; today, we must seek his face in repentance and look to the Sovereign Judge for mercy and forgiveness of our sins.

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Soli Deo Gloria!

Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Pastor Charles R. Biggs
Ketocin Covenant Presbyterian Church
Post Office Box 628
Round Hill, VA 20142-0628
www.APlaceforTruth.org
crbiggsman@adelphia.net