

Revelation 19:11-16

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-19/revelation-1911-16/>

John sees the moment of Jesus's second coming. In contrast to Christ's first advent (that of a poor suffering servant, born in a stable, riding a donkey), now Christ comes down from Heaven on a white horse, His eyes flaming with fire, crowned with many crowns, His robe dipped in blood, and armies of heaven following Him on white horses. He comes to judge and to wage war on His enemies, a sword proceeding from His mouth. He will rule with a rod of iron, and will crush the antichrist and his followers like grapes in a wine press. He is the King of all kings, and the Lord over all lords.

In Revelation 19:11-19 we see what every believer should long for—the return of Jesus to earth, to bring justice and set all things right. In fact, believers “who have loved His appearing” will receive a special reward, a “crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8). John reports *And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True*. John sees Jesus descending from heaven, and Jesus is sitting upon a *white horse*. In Jesus' first advent, He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11). This was prophesied in Zechariah 9:9, which includes:

“Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
(Zechariah 9:9)

The word translated “salvation” has the same root as the “saves” in “Yahweh saves”—which is the meaning of the Hebrew name transliterated through several languages into English as “Jesus.” Jesus came in His first advent to earth to save the world from sin. The donkey has been historically linked with Redemption. Samson fought with the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15). King David went to face Goliath of Gath with a donkey, “Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a young goat, and sent them by David his son to Saul” (1 Sam 16:20).

Abraham set out with a donkey to sacrifice his son in obedience to God, where God would spare Isaac the son and offer instead a ram as the sufficient sacrifice, “Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son” (Genesis 22:3).

“Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them on the donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt...”(To redeem Israel, Exodus 4:20).

Jesus' first advent is a dramatic contrast with this second advent, with Jesus the conqueror coming to earth on a *white horse*—of whom it is said *in righteousness He judges and wages war*. The Jesus of Revelation 19 is the Jesus predicted in Daniel 9:13-14:

“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
‘And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.’”
(Daniel 7:13-14)

These show two vastly differing Old Testament presentations of the advent of Messiah. Zechariah 9:9 is of Messiah as the humble servant on a donkey. Daniel 7:13-14 is the conquering ruler on a white horse. This dramatic contrast in Messianic prophetic depiction has understandably caused debate over the centuries.

We now know that the two presentations are harmonized by two distinct advents of Jesus. In His first advent on earth, Jesus was born in the humility of a manger. He came as a servant, to fulfill the will of the Father. Because Jesus learned obedience even to death on a cross, He was given the earth to rule as His reward (Philippians 2:5-10; Matthew 28:18). Through His obedience, He defeated Satan, the ruler of this world (John 12:31). Jesus was granted all authority (Matthew 28:18). But apparently Satan will not have his power to rule fully removed until these events of Revelation 19.

Now, in His second advent, Jesus returns to earth on a *white horse* to dispossess Satan’s rule, and take His rightful place to reign over earth. Jesus’s entry on a *white horse* symbolizes His entry to earth as a conquering ruler. We saw in Revelation 3:21 that Jesus conquered sin and temptation during His first advent:

“He who overcomes (“nikeao”), I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame (“nikeao”) and sat down with My Father on His throne.”
Revelation 3:21

The Greek word “nikeao” translated “overcame” in the phrase “as I also overcame” in Revelation 3:21 is translated various ways in Revelation as shown below:

- Overcame, was victorious (NIV), conquered (ESV) (Revelation 3:21)
- Overcome, prevailed (NKJV), won the victory (NLT), conquered (ESV) (Revelation 5:5)
- Conquering, gain the victory (NLT), (Revelation 6:2)
- Overcome, overpower (NIV), conquer (ESV), (Revelation 11:7)
- Overcame, defeated (NLT), triumphed (NIV), conquered (ESV), (Revelation 12:11)
- Victory, victorious (NIV), had conquered (ESV) (Revelation 15:2)

- Overcome, defeat (NLT), triumph (NIV), conquer (CSB) (Revelation 17:14)

In Revelation 3:21, Jesus promises to share His reward of being granted the authority to rule over the earth to all who overcome sin and temptation through faithful obedience, being a faithful witness and not fearing death, rejection, or loss. Now in Revelation 19, He is returning to earth with His saints to take up His rightful place to reign, which He will share with those who overcame as He also overcame (Revelation 3:21).

Prior to Jesus's return in Revelation 19, Jesus would have already met the church in the air, removing believers from the earth and taking them to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:16). When Jesus comes to meet the church in the air, He will sound a trumpet, as with Joshua when the walls of Jericho fell down (Joshua 6:20). The 1 Thessalonians 4:16 removal of the church from the earth will remove the salt of the world, that which has protected it from corruption (Matthew 5:13).

Just as the fall of Jericho's walls spelled doom for Jericho, so the catching up of the church will spell doom for Satan's kingdom. Jesus is the second Joshua, just as He is the second Adam (Romans 5:14) and the second Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). In the case of being the second Joshua, Jesus even has the same Hebrew name. Just as the first Joshua led Israel to possess the Promised Land, Jesus will lead His people to possess the earth.

Now Jesus is overtaking the fallen world system of Babylon, *and in righteousness He judges and wages war*. In His first advent, Jesus said "I am not judging anyone" (John 8:15). He also said "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17). Jesus died for the sins of the world, and every sin was nailed to the cross with Him (John 3:14-15; Colossians 2:14). Now, in His second advent, Jesus is coming to overthrow and avenge evil, to judge the world, and to set all things right. He was granted authority over the world through being an obedient and faithful servant, having humbled Himself and learned obedience, even to death (Philippians 2:5-10; Matthew 28:18).

John describes Jesus as He descends. John says:

- *His eyes are a flame of fire,*
 - This is the same description of Jesus's eyes as in Revelation 1:14.
 - It is also the characteristic of Jesus noted in the letter to the church at Thyatira.
 - The Bible says God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). Fire represents judgment. This image might symbolize that Jesus is bringing truth and righteous judgement to all He sees.
 - Isaiah 30:33 says "The breath of the Lord, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire," referring to a pyre in Gehenna to judge the king of Assyria, which likely represents the beast.
- *and on His head are many diadems;*
 - That there are *many diadems*, or crowns, shows a many-faceted authority. The beast had ten diadems (Revelation 13:1). That Jesus has *many diadems* indicates that Jesus's authority is vastly greater than that of the beast.
 - The *many diadems* could also indicate great honors (Philippians 2:9).

- *and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.*
 - That Jesus has a *name written on Him* that is unknown to anyone other than *Himself* might show an intimacy within the Godhead, that there is an authority and character known to God but to no other.
 - This might emphasize what the Apostle Paul stated:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

(Romans 11:33-36)

- *He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood,*
 - The linen garments of the righteous saints of God represent the good works they did in His name (Revelation 19:8). This robe is *dipped in blood*, showing the work Jesus did to cleanse us from sin, through His shed
 - Isaiah 63:1-4 predicts that Messiah will have red garments, “like the one who treads in the wine press” because He said “I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath.” This was because “My year of redemption has come.” Jesus will redeem the world, and return it to its original design to be a place of harmony and joy.
- *and His name is called The Word of God.*
 - We know this is Jesus by the context, but now He is named, and His name is *The Word of God*. John made clear in his gospel that Jesus was the living *Word of God* (John 1:1-17).

It is not only Jesus who is descending to earth on a white horse. He has with Him *the armies which are in heaven*. This army is *clothed in fine linen, white and clean*. Given the context of this chapter, it seems this would mean this mighty army is made up of saints of God who have been clothed in the white linen of righteous acts from their lives (Revelation 19:8). There are apparently multiple *armies* descending with Jesus. This could mean that the many nations of earth are assembled into various *armies* (Revelation 21:24).

John sees Jesus descending from heaven on a white horse, and the *armies* of saints following Him *were following Him on white horses* as well. Are the *horses* literal or figurative? They are likely figurative, given the additional images in the passage, such as a *sharp sword* coming out of Jesus’s *mouth*. But they could also be literal. It is clear that heaven is populated with a number of creatures that are not human (see for example the cherubim of Ezekiel 10, as well as Revelation 4:6-9; 5:6-8; 5:11-14; 7:11). The new earth may well be populated with all sorts of creatures, including those we are familiar with from the present earth. If the horses are literal, then just as humans have been transformed to the point that John fell down and worshipped (Revelation 19:10) these horses would have been transformed for flight.

John notes that *From His (Jesus’s) mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations*. This image of a *sharp sword* is likely figurative. The image tells John that

Jesus has the power to *strike down the nations* merely with His word. This should come as no surprise, since the word of God created the world in the first place, and Jesus, the living Word, was the agent of creation (Genesis 1; Colossians 1:16-17). At this point in Revelation, the world system has already fallen—we saw that in chapter 18. Now the rulers of the nations are going to be stricken down, and replaced with a new kingdom ruled by Jesus.

Jesus will strike down the rulers of nations of the earth *and He will rule them with a rod of iron*. The phrase *rod of iron* indicates an absolute authority to rule. This will satisfy the prophecy of Psalm 2:

“Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.
‘You shall break them with a rod of iron,
You shall shatter them like earthenware.’”
(Psalm 2:8-9)

This Psalm speaks of the Messiah being given the earth as His reward, and the nations His to rule. This is likely speaking of a kingdom that will be set up on the current earth. But the new earth will also have nations (Revelation 21:24).

With the power to rule the nations now being implemented by Jesus, *He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty*. The nations of the earth that have exploited people and persecuted God’s people will now be judged. They will incur *fierce wrath* from God. Their judgement will be like a *wine press*. In a *wine press*, all the juice or blood is squeezed out of the grapes. Similarly, these earthly powers will have their rule and authority completely eliminated. This judgement will not be for a season; it will be forever.

The rulers of the earth will be replaced with a new ruler, who will be Jesus. John sees this from a *name that is written on both His robe and on His thigh. He has a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*” In the new earth, there will still be kings, as stated in Revelation 21, which in this context is speaking of the new Jerusalem:

“The nations will walk by [Jerusalem’s] light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” (Revelation 21:24).

Even though there are still kings, Jesus is the *King* that is over all other *Kings* as well as the *Lord* of all other *Lords*.

Biblical Text

¹¹ And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. ¹³ He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. ¹⁵ From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that

with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. ¹⁶ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”