

# Revelation 19:11– 22:21

*The Tale of Two Cities: (2) The Garden City*

## Introduction

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### The Divine Warrior King (19:11–16)

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#### Picking Up The Story

Let's pick up from where we were last time.

Do you remember?

There was still a problem remaining.

We had a wedding to go to but there was a shadow over it.

Do you remember?

The harlot Babylon had been dealt with.

But that left some other enemies.

After all, according to Revelation 17:15–18, God's means for bringing the harlot to ruin was the beast and the ten powers behind him.

So, there is still the beast and the false prophet to be dealt with.

But there is still more.

There is still the one behind the two of them: the serpent.

And there is still the judgment of the living and the dead.

There are stories yet to be told.

Ends yet to be had.

A secure eternity yet to be witnessed and secured.

And with this, we enter the fray in chapter 19, verse 11.

## **An Open Heaven**

And we begin in verse 11 with John telling us that he saw heaven standing open.

I think that this means heaven is accessible.

There is free, unrestricted, access.

There is nothing to keep us out because any barriers have been removed.

In fact, if you keep your eyes open from here on, you'll notice that nothing more is heard about what happens in heaven after this verse.

## **Introducing One On a White Horse<sup>1</sup>**

So, as we look over John's shoulder, what is the first thing he and we see?

Do you remember how the very first judgments began?

Think back to chapter 6.

The Lamb opens the first of the seven seals.

In the original Greek the nine words are exactly the same as they are here.

Literally, John said...

*'And behold a white horse and one sitting upon it..'*

Do you recall that we saw the seven seals broken on the scroll but never got to read its contents?

Well, I wonder whether the recall of the white horse here is designed to tell us we are about to see the contents of the scroll played out in front of our eyes.

But let's see what we can find out about the rider on this horse.

We are told nine things about him.

Can you see them.

***Faithful and true***

First, he is called 'Faithful and True'.

Well, these words are used of Jesus back in chapter 3, verse 14.

In speaking to the churches, he told them that he was the ***faithful and true*** witness.

Later, we will hear that he who sits on the throne tells us that his words are ***faithful and true*** (21:5).

So, this one seated on a white horse is Jesus, who is also God.

***With justice judges and wages war***

Second, he who is seated on the white horse is he who 'with justice judges and wages war'.

Notice again the two tasks he does.

With justice he ***judges*** and ***wages war***.

The Old Testament is replete with references to God coming to judge in righteousness (Psalm 9:8; 72:2; 96:12-13; 98:9).

Isaiah 11:4 talks about the shoot from the stump of Jesse.

That is, it talks about the Messiah.

And Isaiah tells us that he will 'with righteousness ... judge the needy and with justice give decisions for the poor of the earth.'

Immediately following this, he says that this rod of Jesse will...

*Strike the earth with the rod of his mouth...*

And...

*With the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*

In Revelation the only other one who is said to judge is God (6:10; 11:18; 16:5; 18:8, 20; 19:2; 20:12, 13).

So, again, the rider is identified as Jesus and is said to be linked with God.

This is the one who was snatched up into heaven on Revelation 12:5 but now returns in triumph to judge and wage war.

But on whom does this rider wage war?

Well, verse 19 tells us.

It is against the beast and the kings of the earth.

### ***Eyes like blazing fire***

The **third** thing said about this rider is that 'his eyes are like blazing fire'.

Again, this is language used of Jesus in Revelation 1:14 and 2:18.

### ***A head with many crowns***

Fourth, this rider is said to have many crowns or diadems.

Elsewhere in the book, only the dragon and the beast are said to have these.

The dragon has only seven.

The beast has ten.

But they are limited to one per head.

This rider on the white horse has **many** crowns on one head.

He is the one with true and complete royal authority.

### ***A name written on him***

Fifth, he has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

Now, there are others in revelation are said to have names written on them.

They include the 144,000 (14:1)...

The great harlot (17:5)...

However, the only other person who is said to have a name which no one else knows is the one who conquers in the letters to the churches (2:17).

In

***Dressed in a robe dipped in blood***

Sixth, this rider is 'dressed in a robe dipped in blood'.

Now, the question here is obvious: Whose blood?

Well, it could be the blood of the Lamb, that is, his own blood.

Or it could be the blood of the righteous.

Both feature regularly in Revelation.

However, the image probably comes from Isaiah 63 where God is said to come with garments stained crimson.

As we read on, we find the crimson is the crimson of blood.

He has trodden the winepress of his wrath among the nations.

Verse 15 would seem to indicate that this is the Scripture being referred to here.

***Whose name is the Word of God***

The seventh characteristic is that his name is the Word of God.

As we have already seen, this is linked with the gospel and with the word of testimony.

It is possible, given that John is writing, that here it might be a reference to Jesus, the living Word of God, to whom the word of the gospel points.

Verse 14 has the armies of heaven following him on their own white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

The language is language used elsewhere in Revelation for the followers of the Lamb.

In other words, this army is the people of the Lamb, the followers of the Lamb.

The census of this army was taken in chapter 7, verse 14.

This army was mustered in chapter 14, verses 1-5.

Now they are with their leader.

However, the striking thing about them is that their attire is not battle attire.

In fact, it is their wedding attire, as we see back in verses 7 and 8.

That is because they are not expected to engage in war with their leader.

They are to watch and celebrate.

### ***Who has a weapon***

In verse 15, we are given the eighth characteristic of our rider.

He has a weapon.

It is a sword.

We heard about this sword from the Lord Christ in chapter 2.

It will be mentioned again in verse 21.

Well, we heard earlier about Isaiah 11 and the root of Jesse.

Well, in the same passage, the root of Jesse is said to strike the nations with the rod of his mouth and rules the nations with a rod of iron.

This in turn refers back to Psalm 2.

***Who has a name***

Finally, we find out that our rider has a name.

That name is inscribed on his robe and on his thigh.

The name of this one, which no one else knows is something we are told by John.

His name is 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'

The sign of his victory and his might to save in his day of vengeance.

Friends, this is the true Jesus.

God's Son.

God's Messiah.

God in the flesh.



Who exercises God's power in purity, victory, righteousness and vindication.

He comes to retake the kingship of God given to Adam but which was usurped by evil and the Evil One.

We have taken time out to explore this passage because of its importance.

It is a grand portrait.

Here is the one who is the key to all history.

Someone mighty.

A great one.

One in charge.

This is the Warrior King returning to earth.

This is the second coming.

And he comes with his saints.

He is riding forth in triumph, judging the enemies of God and the people of God.

He is waging war against them.

It was a victory signed and sealed on the cross.

But now it will be universally known and proclaimed.

So, let's watch and see what happens.

## **The Great Battle (19:17–20:10)**

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### **A First Perspective (19:17–21)**

In verse 17 we turn to the great battle.

And we observe it from a number of different perspectives.

First, there is chapter 19, verses 17–21.

Then there is chapter 20, verses 7–10.

Both have introductions.

The first introduction is the one we have just looked at, the introduction to One on a white horse.

The second introduction is in verses 1–6.

It is the introduction to the thousand years or, if you like, the millennium.

Because of the ground we need to cover, I'll have to move quite quickly through this, even though I will need to slow down once we get to the first part of chapter 20.

First, let's look at the great battle as it is portrayed in verses 17–21.

The primary focus of the battle that will be waged by the King of King and Lord of Lords is given in verse 19.

The beast and the false prophet have been the public face of evil in the world.

It is they who have seduced and deceived the world.

They are captured in verse 20.

They are thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur.

The rest are killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse.

In fulfilment of Ezekiel 39, birds gorge themselves on their flesh.

## **A Second Perspective (20:1-15)**

### **Introducing the Millennium (20:1-6)**

#### **Scene 1 (verses 1-3)**

But now let's move on to verses 1-6.

Here we are introduced to the millennium, the thousand years.

Let's see if we can work out what is going on.

First, notice that there are three scenes.

The first is in verses 1-3.

John sees an angel with a key to the Abyss.

He seizes the devil, or Satan, binds him for a thousand years, and throws him into the Abyss.

This results in him being restrained from deceiving the nations in that millennium.

#### **Scene 2:**

The second scene is in verses 4-6.

This time John sees some thrones of those who had been given authority to judge.

He also sees the souls of those beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God.

They had not worshipped the beast or his image.

Nor had they received his mark on their foreheads or hands.

They come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years.

This is labelled the first resurrection.

Then we are introduced to the second death and told that it will have no power over them.

They will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

### ***Scene 3 (verses 7-10)***

Scene three contains the next reference to the thousand years.

When it is over, Satan is released and a battle ensues.

We'll take a look at that battle a little later.

### ***Thinking about the millennium***

Okay, lets now see if we can get some perspective on the millennium.

Let's give it some thought and investigation.

First, look at verse 4.

John sees thrones.

He sees people seated on them who are given authority to judge.

This appears to be a heavenly perspective.

Then, in the second half of verse 4, he notes that these are people who have died because of their gospel preaching and living.

They were resurrected.

That is, they came to live and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

But the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.

Second, look at verses 5 and 6.

There are references to a first resurrection and a second death.

Let's start with the second death.

What is it?

Well, look down at verses 14 and 15.

It is being thrown into the lake of fire.

It is a spiritual death.

It is eternal in nature.

The first death is physical death.

It is the death that came because of sin back in Genesis 3.

Physical death is awful because it breaks relationships with other people.

Spiritual death is far more awful.

It is about eternal break of relationship with God.

So, that leads us to our third point.

If that's first death and second death, what do you think that first resurrection and second resurrection might be?

Well, verse 4 helps us.

It tells us of those who have been faithful to Jesus and died but are seated and judging.

They are reigning with Christ.

However, there is another resurrection to come.

That second resurrection is the one when they will receive new bodies.

So, they are present and reigning with Christ even now.

So, the thousand years that time that exists between the first coming of Christ and the second.

During that time, Christians carry out gospel ministry.

That is, they go about the ministry of the word of God.

They testify about Jesus.

And some of them pay the ultimate cost.

They die.

But, as Ephesians says, even when they were alive they were raised up together with Christ into the heavenly places.

That union with Christ doesn't stop with death.

That continues past death.

And one day, at the end of time, at the second resurrection, they will not experience the second death.

No, they will receive a resurrection body.

Friends, this matches what is said in other parts of the New Testament.

For example, we are told that Satan was bound as Jesus carried out his ministry of exorcisms (Matthew 12:29).

Similarly, gospel ministry restricts Satan's reach and power.

And when the thousand years are over his end will come dramatically and climactically as we will see in verses 7-10.

### **A Second Perspective (20:7-10)**

So, now let's turn to verses 7-10.

As we do, let me remind you that this is about the great and final battle again.

Perhaps you remember that this is a second perspective on this battler.

The first perspective was in chapter 19, verses 17-21.

It was introduced by a focus on the rider on the white horse, with his followers.

Then we watched him wage war on the beast, with his followers.

Clearly, the Lord Christ and his victory over the beast is the focus in both the introduction and the battle.

The second perspective has an introduction that focusses on Satan and his binding.

Then, we watch a war again in verses 7–10.

I think that it is the same war that we watched in chapter 19, verses 17–2.

However, the focus this time is not on Jesus, the beast, and the false prophet.

No.

This time the camera has focussed on another view.

It is on Satan's attack on the people of God.

But where the Lord Christ is victorious, Satan is not.

In verse 10, he is thrown into the lack of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown.

Both battles allude to Ezekiel 38–39.

Both battles have God victorious.

## **Final Judgment (20:11–21:8)**

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### **A First Perspective (20:11–15)**

#### ***The negative side***

Phew, this is hard work, isn't it?

Are you still with me?

I hope so!



The hard work has been done now.

Let's now have go for a run through the rest.

We are now looking at the final judgment.

The woman is gone.

The beast and his cohorts has gone.

Satan is overthrown.

What remains is judgment of humans.

And we are given two perspectives.

The first is verses 11-15 of chapter 20.

The first perspective gives us the negative side.

By this, I mean the side that focusses on those humans who have been on the wrong side of the spiritual battle.

Friends, the spiritual reality is that God is the God of all the earth.

He is and will be the judge of all the earth.

Nothing escapes his eye.

And all that he sees will have its day of accounting before him.

That is what is conveyed here.

The dead, great and small, stand before him.

Books are opened.

This is great comfort for God's saints.

However, it ought to be a great terror for those who are not.

Everything that opposes or contradicts his holiness will be overcome by his holiness and judged by him.

And everyone who ignores or defies him can expect the second death.

***With a positive aspect***

However, friends, while the picture here is tough, there was one positive aspect noticed.

Did you see it?

Look at verse 12.

Look at the mention of the book of life.

Only those not mentioned in it are not thrown into the lake of fire.

**A Second Perspective (21:1-8)**

***The positive side***

This neatly leads us into the second perspective on the final judgment.

Where the first was overwhelmingly negative, this one is overwhelmingly positive.

This is the destiny of the righteous.

Now, friends, I need to emphasise something here.

You see, we Christians have largely lived in a world that is relatively accommodating to Christians.

But that world is not the usual world that Christians face.

The usual world for those who testify to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus is a world of hostility.

Revelation shows us that.

The history of the world illustrates that.

The hordes of Christians who have died in the last century show us that.

The trend in our own country demonstrates that.

And it is this vision in verses 1–8 that is designed by God to encourage steadfastness, faithfulness, confidence, and hope.

No matter how grim things are or might become, the future is secure and strong.

This picture is designed by God to stimulate our faith and stir us on.

And look at it.

God the creator has a new heaven and a new earth waiting.

For Israelites, the sea was a place of deep, dark, chaotic and fearsome things.

Well, such wont exist in this new heaven and new earth.

What will exist is the city of God.

A place where God dwells with is people.

What will exist is intense fellowship with God such as that experienced by a bride with a husband.

Such a place will have no tears of sorrow.

There will be a total absence of death.

Mourning or crying won't be known.

Pain won't be felt.

These will be dim memories of a past world.

That order will have passed away.

And he who sits on the throne will say:

*I am making everything new!*

Then he will say...

*Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.*

Friends, consider our sisters and brothers around the world who suffer for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Think of those in jail.

Those being cruelly treated.

Those tortured.

Those whose women are abused.

Those whose men are brutalised.

Those who have no scriptures to give them comfort except those bits they can remember.

To them God promises full rest and satisfaction.

The victorious will inherit all this.

God will be their God.

They will be his children.

My guess is that the water of verse 6 is the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps this is a verse for those like many in the Bible who have felt God's absence and thirsted for his presence.

And God promises them springs of water without cost.

His presence on tap.

***With a negative aspect***

However, just as the first perspective was largely negative but sounded a positive, so in this largely positive perspective there is sounded a negative.

Look at verse 8.

*<sup>8</sup>But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” [Revelation 21:8; NIV]*

## **Pictures of the New Jerusalem (21:9–22:5)**

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### **A Bride**

Let's now survey the next chapter.

What happens is that John is shown the conflation and crossover of three great themes within Scripture.

First, there is the bride.

We encountered here for the first time in chapter 19.

However, the image is ancient.

Israel was often presented as a bride.

Most famous among those passages is the prophecy of Hosea, which in turn draws on the story of God courting Israel in the wilderness after they have escaped from Egypt.

Basically, the wilderness was seen to be the high point of the relationship.

After that Israel was seen to be a prostitute.

God had courted her but she had played the harlot.

Well, here we return to the image unsullied.

Christ and the church are bound together in untainted relationship.

There is intimacy.

There is joy.

There is victory, purity, and permanence.

And there is no hint that anything anywhere anytime will harm this.

## **A City**

But in chapter 21, verse 10 the image changes.

The bride of the Lamb turns out to be the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

It's fundamental character is one of shining with the glory of God (verse 11).

Now, earlier in Revelation, Jerusalem was not a positive image.

As Israel had been a harlot but now as the church is a bride, so too with this image.

Back in Revelation 11:18, we read that the physical Jerusalem is identified as the place where Israel's Lord was crucified.

It is figuratively called 'Sodom' and 'Egypt'.

So, the physical Jerusalem is rejected.

Now there is a new Jerusalem.

And the New Jerusalem shines as it compares with the alternative city, Babylon.

The new Jerusalem is totally centred around God.

Look at Revelation 21:22 and following.

In the old Jerusalem, there was a temple.

That temple symbolised the presence of God.

But for God to be present sin had to be repeatedly atoned for.

God's presence was therefore always fragile because sin was always a way of life for the people of God.

But look here.

Now there is no temple.

There is no temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its lamp.

There is free and unbridled access for all whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## **A Garden**

However, not even the temple is enough to capture the new reality won by the Lamb slaughtered but standing.

Not even the temple is glorious enough to talk about the new people of God.

No.

To do that you need to return to Eden where serpents were and where sin began.

So, look at what happens in chapter 22.

The temple in Israel always had echoes of the garden.

However, now the temple as a symbol of the presence of God is merged with the garden as the place where God freely walked among his people.

There is a river of the water of life.

It is as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

There is healing.

Absence of curse.

Constant access to God and the Lam.

Free service of him.

Constant seeing of his face.

No need for lights or lams or even the Sun.

For the Lord God will give them light.



Friends, these images of a bride, a city, a garden are exactly that, images.

But by painting these images we are conjuring up the deepest longings of humans.

For the deepest longing of humans is to know God and to be related to him.

The great news announced in the gospel is that this is possible.

The great news announced in the book of Revelation is that this cannot be adequately pictured in words.

But if we know and love Jesus and have him as our chief desire then it will be all that we could dream or imagine and then even more.

Nothing good will be missing.

Everything bad will be absent.

No serpent.

No beast.

No harlot.

No servants of these three.

But...

The Father will be there.

The Lamb will be there.

The Spirit will be there.

And the Bride, the servants of the Lamb, will be there.

Friends, our Lord testifies to the truths contained in this book.

He says...

*Yes, I am coming soon.*

And all who love him and live in this waiting world say...

*Amen. Come Lord Jesus.*

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<sup>1</sup> This section is indebted to Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Rev. ed.; Reading the New Testament Series; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 180.