

The Manifestation of Christ

Introductory Notes to the Second Coming of Christ

- Christ is coming again! His return is one coming in two distinct stages. First, Christ comes to the air as the Son of God for the saints. Second, at least seven years later, He comes to the earth as the Son of man with His saints.
- It is this *second* stage of the second coming of Christ that is in view in Revelation 19. Sometimes it is referred to as the manifestation, the second advent or the revelation. Scripture uses words such as *apokalypsis* (an ‘uncovering’ or ‘unveiling’, 2 Thessalonians 1.7) and *epiphaneia* (to ‘appear’ or ‘shine forth’, Titus 2.13) to describe this event.
- This coming in two distinct stages should not surprise us because the first coming was the same. First, He came privately and quietly to Bethlehem. Only a few of His own knew He had arrived. Second, 30 years (a generation) later, His coming was heralded by John the Baptist as He began His public ministry. Then all saw His power and glory.
- That there are differences between the rapture (first stage) and the manifestation (second stage) is obvious:
 - The rapture is not heralded by any signs – it is imminent. The manifestation is preceded by many signs (cf. Matthew 24.7, 29-30).
 - The rapture is always associated with the language of blessing, comfort and rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 4.18). The manifestation is often associated with judgment and destruction (2 Thessalonians 2.8).
 - The rapture is only the subject of NT revelation because it is a truth for the church. The manifestation is a constant theme of OT prophecy as it signals the consummation of God’s promises to Israel.
- The second coming is the consummation of prophecy. It has long been promised and long anticipated (Zechariah 14.3-4; Matthew 24.29-30). When Christ returns, He will accomplish three major objectives.
 - Destruction. All the enemies of God, Christ, Israel and the saints will be destroyed.
 - Deliverance. Israel, about to be finally extinguished from the face of the earth, will be rescued by their Messiah.
 - Dominion. Christ is coming to reign. The administration of the universe belongs to Him. Everything in heaven and on earth will be brought under the perfect headship and authority of Christ for 1,000 literal years.

The Splendour of the Sovereign [vv.11-16]

v.11. All the figures described in the following verses are taken from the scene of a victorious Roman general. He would return from battle with a triumphal procession on a white horse, His titles being inscribed on his clothes and banners. He would also carry the diadems of those kings he had conquered. The difference here is that, so certain is His victory, this King has the badges of triumph *before* the battle happens!

John saw **heaven opened**, a perfect passive participle indicating that once heaven opens, it remains ‘standing open’. There is no further suggestion that heaven is closed again throughout the millennial reign. It will be perfectly possible to look into heaven from earth during this time, and see the splendence of the heavenly city, New Jerusalem (cf. John 1.51). Earlier in Revelation (4.1), a door opened to *receive* John – a picture of the rapture. Now, heaven itself is opened to *reveal* Christ – He is coming out! Heaven has temporarily opened in the past, sometimes to signal a revelation from God (cf. Ezekiel 1.1; Acts 10.11), and often in association with Christ (cf. Matthew 3.16; Mark 1.10; Luke 3.21; Acts 7.56) as He is the Mediator between God (heaven) and men (earth). With a statement of exclamation, **behold**, John sees a **white horse**. White horses were appropriate mounts for rulers, important officials, and conquerors entering Rome in triumph (Keener). This is therefore a striking symbol in anticipation of the military victory and righteous conquest that belongs to Christ. White symbolises the righteousness and purity of His actions and judgment (cf. 20.11). All is set in contrast to the lowly colt the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem four days before He was crucified (Zechariah 9.9; Matthew 21.5). In contrast to the horse, the ass was a beast of burden and humiliation, fitting therefore for the lowly Lamb about to be slain at Calvary. A rider on a white horse was revealed under the first seal of Revelation 6.2, but the two are not the same. That horseman was a personification of false Christs promising universal peace and safety through diplomacy, the chief example of which is the Antichrist himself. The rider on this horse is the *true* Christ, hence **he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True**. The Beast made a covenant with Israel and broke it – he was not faithful. His coming will be with “lying wonders” – deception, not truth is his manifesto. Christ is quite the opposite! He is **faithful** to God and His word (promises) and **true** [*alēthinos*], or ‘genuine’ – He is the real Christ, and all He claims to be, characterised by truth not falsehood. It is these character traits that guarantee **in righteousness** (with absolute justice) **he doth judge** and **make** (go to) **war**. At His first coming, “grace and truth” brought salvation to men. At His second coming, “He will come forth as Faithful and True to execute judgment,” (Hamilton Smith). Before Christ can reign in righteousness (cf. Isaiah 11.3-5), He must first remove all things that offend. This phrase therefore describes “the decisions and actions of this warrior-king as He acts righteously for God in the execution of divine justice on the nations,” (Jim Allen).

v.12. His **eyes** as a **flame of fire** recalls the earlier descriptions of 1.14 and 2.18. The phrase describes the penetrating discernment of one who cannot be deceived (cf. Hebrews 4.13). He can detect all rebellion and unbelief, see the inner motives of the heart and evaluate everything by the perfect standard of His holiness. His judgment, therefore, cannot be superficial or mistaken. On his **head** were **many crowns** [*diadēma*] – this is the word which refers to a royal crown rather than the victor's crown [*stephanos*]. The dragon has seven crowns (12.3), and the Beast has ten crowns (13.1), but Christ has *many* crowns indicating unlimited and eternal sovereignty – He is King of kings. There is only One who can be entrusted with the exercise of absolute dominion. He had **a name written**, that **no man knew, but he himself**. This passage is full of names that belong to Christ. Already He has been called “Faithful and True”, now He has an unrevealed name. Names are important in Scripture because they reveal character. But this name is private, suggesting that there is a glory to His person that is incomprehensible and, as yet, unrevealed (cf. Genesis 32.29; Judges 13.18).

v.13. John saw Christ **clothed** [*periballō*] with a **vesture dipped in** (stained completely with) **blood**. He was ‘wrapped around’ with a garment immersed, not in His own blood, but in the blood of His enemies after treading the “winepress of the wrath of God” (see v.15, cf. Isaiah 63.1-3). Though Christ has not yet trampled His enemies, the imagery likely anticipates the battle about to be fought and its victorious outcome. His **name**, in this context, is **called** the **Word** [*logos*] **of God**. The “Word” is a personal title of the Lord Jesus unique to the writings of John. It signifies that Christ is the full revelation of the essence of God. John 1.1 refers to the eternal *Person* of “the Word”. 1 John 1.1 emphasises His *provision* as the “Word of life” – the personal manifestation and source of divine life (John 17.3). Here in Revelation, the thought concerns His *power* as the One who reveals the righteous judgment of God in destroying His enemies. **v.14.** Christ will not be alone when He comes out of heaven. John sees **the armies which were in heaven** accompanying and following Him. Undoubtedly these armies include a huge angelic host (Matthew 25.31; 2 Thessalonians 1.7) and the church (Colossians 3.4). But there are other scriptures which suggest the whole host of the redeemed from every age will join Christ in the moment of His triumph (cf. Zechariah 14.5; 1 Thessalonians 3.13; Jude 14). Perhaps the armies will be in *four* divisions including the church, OT saints, martyrs of the Tribulation, and the whole angelic host. The armies of the redeemed will sit on **white horses**, which is remarkable since in the ancient world this privilege belonged only to the conquering king. Clearly, all the saints are viewed as overcoming conquerors in association with their Lord. The saints are **clothed in fine linen, white and clean**, which is similar dress to that of the wife of the Lamb and symbolises righteousness (19.8). These individuals are morally fitted to accompany the King. Fine linen is a very costly, delicate, soft linen made from flax. As to the word “white”, Jim Allen says, “Earlier (v.8), the word **white** is *lampros*, bright, reflecting the glorious splendour of the bridal attire; here the word is *leukos* which, with the colour of the horses, is in stark contrast to the darkness of earth under a darkened sun, a stricken moon and falling stars.” That these garments are “clean” is perhaps set in contrast to the garments of the Lord “dipped in blood”. The saints are not engaged in warfare, and neither do they carry weapons. They are still wearing the apparel of festivity, as they are on their way to a wedding feast!

v.15. This verse describes the Lord Jesus under *three* figures – He is a soldier, a shepherd and a farmer. Out of **His mouth** goes a **sharp sword** [*rhomphaia*] with which he should **smite the nations**. The *rhomphaia* was a large (Thracian) thrusting weapon used at close quarters. With the power of His spoken word (cf. Genesis 1.3, John 18.6) the Lord Jesus will strike down the Gentile nations gathered at Armageddon (v.19, cf. Isaiah 11.4). Indeed, the Beast will be destroyed “by the breath of his mouth” (2 Thessalonians 2.8, NET). He will also **rule** [*poimainō*] **them with a rod of iron**, a clear reference to Psalm 2.9, “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” This does not so much refer to Christ *governing* the nations (with a royal sceptre) but *destroying* the nations as a conquering King (with a shepherd’s club). This is an inflexible, unbending club by which He protects (guards) His flock (the remnant of Israel) from the predators that would harm it. The image of treading the **winepress of the fierceness** [*thymos*] **and wrath** [*orgē*] **of Almighty God** is symbolic of divine judgment (cf. Isaiah 63.1-3; Joel 3.13). A wine press consisted of two stone basins connected by a trough. Grapes would be trampled in the upper basin, and the juice would collect in the lower basin. The splattering and redness of the juice, as well as the staining of the feet and garments of those treading the winepress is a vivid image of divine judgment. The day has finally arrived when God’s almighty (omnipotent) power will be manifested as all His enemies are vanquished – the outworking of His vehement fury [*thymos*] and settled indignation [*orgē*].

v.16. A final name is revealed, being written **on his vesture** (clothing) **and on his thigh**. This likely refers not to two places, but to one – the spot on his robe at thigh level. This is the place where the sword would rest and was conspicuous for all to see. The title is **King of kings and Lord of lords** (cf. 17.14; 1 Timothy 6.15). Christ will be King over those who rule as kings, and Lord over those who exercise lordship. Jim Allen notes, “Moses (Deuteronomy 10.17) and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2.47) spoke of deity in these terms but now deity is manifest in Christ and He is the absolute Sovereign.” In John’s day, this title was used of Caesar as one who was lord over client kings in the provinces. Yet it is not Caesar but Christ who is truly Lord of the universe.

A Summons to the Supper [vv.17-18]

v.17. In a gruesome picture to illustrate the slaying of vast armies of people, carnivorous birds are called to gorge themselves at the great banquet of God by feeding on the flesh of those slain at the return of Christ. John saw **an angel standing in the sun** which may mean in front of the sun, casting a partial eclipse. He stands in a conspicuous place – the highest point in the sky where all the birds of prey could see him and respond to his summons. MacArthur says, “Evidently the worldwide darkness associated with the fifth bowl (16.10) has been lifted, since the sun is again visible. The lifting of that earlier darkness would also explain how the smoke from Babylon’s destruction was visible at a distance (18.9-19).” The angel’s **cry** with a **loud voice** signifies the importance of the command. The **fowls** (birds) **that fly** are carrion birds circling high overhead. In a probable reference to the same event, the Lord Jesus used the word “eagles” (vultures) instead of the general word for birds (Matthew 24.28). Vultures are incredibly swift in discovering and reaching prey. The angelic summons is to **gather to the supper of the great God**, or “the great supper of God” [JND]. There is a clear contrast with the marriage supper of the Lamb (v.9), the implication being that there are two messianic banquets: the wedding feast of the Lamb for saints and the terrible feast *on* sinners for the fowls. **v.18.** The menu at this gruesome banquet is the flesh of men. The vultures are invited to eat their fill of the **flesh of kings**, of **captains** (military generals), of **mighty men** (‘powerful people’ of political and economic importance), the **flesh of horses** and those who ride them (cavalry) and even the **flesh of all men** – whether **free** or **bond**, **small** or **great** (as to social standing). This final judgment makes no social, cultural or economic distinctions. All those set in opposition to Christ will be slain by the sword of His mouth.

The Slaughter of the Soldiers [vv.19-21]

v.19. John sees those who are gathered as lambs (or beasts!) to the slaughter. The **Beast** (Antichrist), the **kings of the earth** (including the ten kings allied to the Beast), and **their armies** are all **gathered together** in a place which has earlier been called Armageddon (16.16). The mustering of the world’s military forces is because of demonic *and* divine power. As far as the demonic is concerned, John has described “spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (16.14). Satan is behind this vast movement. But God is in ultimate control. He has sent “strong delusion” to believe the lie of the Beast (2 Thessalonians 2.11) and put it in the “hearts” (minds) of the ten kings to give their kingdoms to the Beast (17.17). This gathering of worldwide military might seems to be for the purpose of finally extinguishing the Jews and securing the position of the Beast as world leader. But the assembled armies soon turn their attention to make war against Christ in a desperate attempt to prevent Him from taking the reins of universal government. Read Psalm 2.1-6.

v.20. This verse has a remarkable economy of language. There is no description of an ensuing battle and no indication of any effective resistance – the **beast** is simply **taken** [*piazō*], that is, seized and taken into custody (captured). Paul is a little more dramatic, “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming,” (2 Thessalonians 2.8). The **false prophet** was also captured, the same prophet who **wrought miracles** to deceive the world into receiving the **mark of the beast** and **worship his image** (13.13-15). Both were **cast alive** into the **lake of fire** (cf. 20.10, 14, 15; 21.8). Solemnly, 1,000 years later, the lake of fire is described as the place “where the beast and false prophet are,” (20.10). The passing of time has not annihilated their persons or alleviated their suffering. There is no judicial review at the Great White Throne for these men, perhaps because their rebellion against God and His Christ has been so public and brazen. There is a difference between hell [*hades*] and the lake of fire. Hades is the temporary abode of the departed dead as they await their final resurrection and judicial sentencing at the Great White Throne (20.13-14). Eventually, all those in hell will be raised, reviewed and cast into the lake of fire – the final, permanent place of incarceration and punishment of sinners for eternity. The figure of a burning lake is God’s chosen imagery for visualising eternity separated from Him. The Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) to the southwest of Jerusalem was a continually burning refuse heap outside the dung gate in the days of the Lord Jesus. It was used as a picture of “the fire that never shall be quenched,” (Mark 9.43, 45). The lake of fire was originally prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25.41). The lake is described as **burning with brimstone**. The word “burning” qualifies lake – this is a burning lake of brimstone. Brimstone is a yellow sulphurous material that is combustible in air and is found in a natural state in volcanic areas such as in the valley of the Dead Sea. Once a sulphur deposit caught on fire, it would melt and run in burning streams down the ravines, spreading its suffocating fumes. A lake of burning sulphur would be very hot and offensive in smell.

v.21. Once the leaders are seized, **the remnant were slain** (killed) by the word of Christ, that is, the **sword** proceeding **out of his mouth**. In an instant the bodies of a vast multitude drop to the earth providing the veritable feast of flesh for the vultures as promised by the angel (v.17). Rather than going immediately to the lake of fire (like the beast and false prophet), the souls of these dead men will go to hell [*hades*] awaiting resurrection and final judgment (20.12).