# The Hallelujah Chorus in Revelation 19

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, September 16, 2020

There are three surprises in Revelation 19 and three conclusions I want to propose. But first, in keeping Pastor Jay’s emphasis upon reading Revelation, let’s just read the chapter out loud.

1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." 3 And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." 4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" 5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" 6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." 10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." 11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. 17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." 19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Let’s start by considering the three surprises. The first surprise is the infrequent use of the word **Hallelujah** in the Bible but the frequent use here. It is common in our vocabulary of worship but not so much in the rest of the Bible. In the NIV, this chapter is the only place the word appears.

What a contrast between chapters 18 and 19! The terror of the earthly scene is replaced by the heavenly victory. God is honored because he appropriately possesses Salvation and gives it to those who receive Jesus Christ. He is glorious in all that he is and does. Such glory is revealed in his just judgments that are now being exacted upon the rebels of earth. He not only has the power, but it is being righteously used. The corruption of the great prostitute is now being punished. The great multitude in heaven celebrates the avenging of the blood of God’s servants. John remembers the blood of every one of the other disciples plus many other friends and co-workers now dead. After all those years justice is finally being meted out. The souls under the altar have been crying out at least since the fifth seal*. "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"[[1]](#footnote-1)* Their cry has been heard and the results are now seen.

Such a scene calls for a loud Hallelujah (praise Yahweh). Although we have this word in the Psalms, it is not found elsewhere in the New Testament except these four uses in this section. We commonly use the word Hallelujah today in worship but we don’t know how commonly it was used in the New Testament church. What is clear is the association with great victory. The first group shouts it out. The second group adds their refrain for emphasis and we echo them both.

The second surprise is the infrequent use of the title “**King of Kings and Lord of Lords**” in the Bible but its important use here in Revelation 19.

We first heard this expression in Daniel 2:36-38 describing someone else. "*This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. 37 You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; 38 in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold*.”

Notice that it was the Lord who gave that title to Nebuchadnezzar. He was the head of gold, the king of Babylon. He was the greatest in that series of four kingdoms that will end with Christ’s kingdom coming to earth. We have been following the demise of Babylon which was code for Rome among the early Christians and the summary for all earth’s kingdoms. Jesus, in his coming, is in the line of those four kingdoms but is the terminator not the continuation. If you are following this biblically, you can see how Jesus absorbs the title of their greatest one and makes it his own.

 If we think about the first century’s perspective two things are worth noting. Since the time of Darius I, Xerxes, and Artexerxes, including the Parthians, many had claimed to be the Great King, King of Kings.[[2]](#footnote-2) A Parthian, riding on a horse, claiming to be the King of Kings was an almost archetypal fear of Romans. The Romans were great soldiers but relied almost exclusively on infantry not cavalry. (Coin shown is INDO-PARTHIAN, *Sases, c. 35-55 AD,* billon tetradrachm, just before the time John wrote Revelation) So the image of Jesus riding a horse, something the Bible doesn’t previously indicate, would have stoked primal Roman fears and while increasing Christian confidence. It’s a good day when you can use a title to show biblical continuity for the faithful and tweak the Romans at the same time.

The third surprise is the celebration of consequences for deeds done, both good and bad. No surprise that the deeds of evil are punished. That has been the subject of a good part of the book. In verse 7 good deeds are celebrated. *7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*

The bride has prepared herself by righteous acts. Not all the emphasis is upon what Jesus has done. Here the emphasis is upon what the bride has done. She has made herself ready. She is appropriately dressed. The great multitude of Revelation 7:9 was dressed like this “*wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”*  The Apostle Paul has his own version of this when he wanted women to dress “…*with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God*.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

A little later, Paul defines those good deeds when he describes the work of a widow who has been faithful to God and her husband. She “*is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds*.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

When we attend the marriage of the Lamb our appearance will be related to our good deeds. In ancient cultures, the beauty of a woman was not primarily in her physical attributes. Rather, her jewelry and clothing were symbols of allurement.[[5]](#footnote-5) In this case, the more the bride does good deeds, the more attractive she becomes. Jesus suggested that such good deeds are essential to our attending the wedding. *"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen.*"[[6]](#footnote-6)

The angel recognizes how good it is to attend and participate in the wedding supper. He says “blessed” are those who are invited to attend. Jesus had earlier intimated what was coming. "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Now John sees it and it is too wonderful for him.

The surprises lead us to three conclusions. First, contemplating this passage encourages those who presently suffer and directs those who will think about the future. So often throughout this book, we have seen that ultimate outcomes matter to those who are in the midst of suffering. For those who think about the future, it is important to know that now is not forever and forever is not now. Whatever today might be, our future, secured through Jesus, is bright.

Second, knowledge of the future gives us content for today’s worship. It certainly did for Handel when he wrote the Messiah. The words are right out of Revelation 19. His worship is among the most loved worship music of all time. We should give glory to God and celebrate his power. It is entirely appropriate to celebrate his victory over evil and evildoers. If the Bible is triumphalist then I am ok with it as well. When the glory of Jesus is being acknowledged in worship, sing out loud and sing out strong.

Finally, considering this chapter helps us prioritize our time and efforts. It teaches us to lay up treasure in heaven, and to do good deeds on the earth as the means of accomplishing it. God wants us to know that the good deeds we do on this earth, even if they have no earthly reward, will be rewarded at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

## Worship only the Lord

10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Having witnessed all this in heaven, it is too much for John. He falls at the feet of the angel who is speaking to worship him. Immediately the angel stops him. The angel informs John that he should not be worshipped.[[8]](#footnote-8) The angel puts himself on the same level with John. John is a servant of God. The angel is a fellow servant. The angel identifies the “testimony[[9]](#footnote-9) of Jesus” as being the decisive indicator of those with whom he shares the servant of God relationship. John had been given the mandate decades earlier to be a witness about Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Judea and beyond. Here he learns that the angels have their own duties with regard to witness. We might say that much of Revelation has been a “witness” that Jesus is King of the Universe. Every judgement was God’s statement, delivered by the angels, that Jesus is the rightful owner of the earth. The angels have their way of witnessing, we have ours, but in both cases we have the testimony of Jesus as Lord.

Witnessing about Jesus is the enlivening power or breath of prophecy. It is what gives it life. That seems to be the meaning of this difficult expression, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.[[10]](#footnote-10)

## Jesus Leads the Armies of Heaven

*11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*.

Here is an incredible description of Jesus. He is called by a series of names and titles. He is Faithful, True, Word of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In the semitic way of thinking, the name captures the essence of the person. Because he has a name known only to himself, the writer is showing the divine and wholly superior nature of the one described. There are several phrases that speak of his power in battle. He makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire. He himself is armed with a sword and rides at the head of his army. One has the impression that the iron scepter could just as easily crack your skull as to be used symbolically.

To top it off, I doubt if the blood on his robe is his own. In the days when battles were fought hand to hand, in close proximity to one’s enemy, bloody clothes are an indication of success and victory. Again, the imagery is from the Old Testament.

*Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." 2 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. 4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come*.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Invitation to the Macabre Supper of the Birds**

*17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."*

If the people of God are invited to a wedding feast the birds of the air are invited to their own event. It is a scene more like crows on road kill than anything good.

**The Final Battle**

*19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh*.

It was quite an array of “dignitaries” that gathered against the Lord’s army. The beast is there. The false prophet is there to fire up the troops with the hope of miracles. Maybe he is there so the troops will not give up immediately. It is hard to believe that any soldier has any hope of victory after seven years of pummeling they have taken. But this deluded and deceived group must actually believe they have a chance.

The average king and soldier are struck down, not by a pitched battle, but by the Sword of the Lord. In the end, they are for the birds.

Apparently the Geneva rules applying to the beast and the false prophet require that they not be killed. Instead they are captured. Rather than being killed and entering the lake of fire in that easy way, they are thrown alive in the fire. It seems grim, but they are responsible for a lot of other people going into the fire. They are only getting a little of the heat they have given to others.

1. Revelation 6:9-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Parthians used characters from Aramaic for writing but "read off" the words according to their own pronunciation. For example the Aramaic title **MLKYN MLK'** (= King of Kings). The Parthians used this title but pronounced it (read it off) as "Shahan Shah" (= King of Kings). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 1 Timothy 2:9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 1 Timothy 5:9-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, chief curator of the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, January-February 2001 Biblical Archaeology Review, page 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Matthew 22:11-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Matthew 22:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. There were issues about angel worship in the region where John pastored. We have a hint of it in Colossians 2:18 “*Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.*” John, ever the pastor, allows this discussion to put angels in their proper place. Angels are important, but Hebrews 1:13-14 also puts them in their place: “*To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. marturia (mar-too-ree'-ah); evidence given (judicially or genitive case): record, report, testimony, witness. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. propheteia (prof-ay-ti'-ah); "prophecy"; prediction (scriptural or other): KJV-- prophecy, prophesying. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Isaiah 63:1-4 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)