

THE PRE-TRIBULATION ARMY OF HEAVEN:  
AN ANALYSIS OF REVELATION 19:14 AND ITS IMPACT ON DISPENSATIONALISM

by

Matthew P. Smith

B.A., M.R.S., M.A.B.S., M.Div., Th.M. (Candidate)

A THESIS

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## CHAPTER 1

### *Introduction*

It is hardly scandalous to consider the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 to include the Church. Both dispensational and covenantal approaches seem to accept this possibility. As seen by the little time commentaries spend on this discussion, the issue as to whether the armies of Heaven are made up of angels alone, the Church alone, or a combination of the two is something seen to be unremarkable.

Perhaps this is because there seems to be so many arguments made before considering the impact of this question. Is Revelation to be studied from the non-literal preterist position, the non-literal historical position, or the non-literal idealist position, or is it to be studied from the literal futurist position? This is a question that seems to take the air out of discussions of this sort.

Even after settling on a futurist position regarding how to approach the book as a whole, more decisions are to be made. One of the most important decisions relates to where the Church is during these future events. If one views the Church as being taken up, raptured, before the start of the Great Tribulation, or sometime in the middle or even at the very end remains to be argued. By the time a person settles these fundamental questions, issues regarding the identity of the saints in Revelation 19:14 have been largely decided.

Theology more than exegesis tends to drive the discussion. This is not only a shame but an undermining of the the basic idea of exegesis that most commentators claim to value. It is the contention of this paper that sound exegesis will make apparent the identity of the

armies of Heaven and that this exegetical conclusion will lend weight to one answer above any other regarding the timing of the rapture and the literalness of things yet to come.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study seeks chiefly to answer two basic questions: who are the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 and does this identity lend credibility to a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church? The answers resulting from this study may seem to be irrelevant to those who put theology before exegesis but to those who consider exegesis the proper starting point of sound theology, this study aims to lend its weight to a contentious debate.

If the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 are found to likely include the Church, questions regarding the nature of the Church and its unity with the coming King will necessarily imply a difference between it and the nation of Israel that is being delivered. If the armies of Heaven are seen to include the Church, questions regarding the literalness and future tense nature of Revelation will need to be addressed with weight brought to bear on the future position being correct.

The purpose of all of this is ultimately to bring confidence to the Scriptural argument being presented by John. Is the Church actually to look forward to coming with Christ in the Second Advent? Is this something promised to the Church? Is it something Christians should look forward to? Should the preacher be able to speak about this with any confidence? After all, to look forward to the future day when the feet of the saints will stand

with Christ on the Mount of Olives to save a people for a millennial promise is one thing. To look forward to this future with confidence is quite another.

### ***Thesis and It's Significance***

Revelation is a book meant to encourage the Church. It begins with a declaration of this encouragement (Rev. 1:1, 3-4) for its intended recipients (Rev. 1:11; 2:1-3:22), and it ends with reference to these same recipients in glory (Rev. 22:16). Yet it is a book largely pointing to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy to an Old Testament nation (Rev. 7:4-8; 14:1-5).

Revelation is also about wrath. It is not about the wrath of Satan, though Satan does express his wrath against Israel (Rev. 12), but it is about the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16; 14:10). This begs the question: where does the Church, the Building of which Christ is cornerstone (Eph 2:19-22), the Body of which Christ is the head (Eph. 4:11-16), the Bride of which Christ is the bridegroom (Eph. 5:22-32), fit into the story?

It is the contention of this paper that the Church is kept from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 3:10), and instead made into unshakable pillars in the temple that is God Himself (Rev. 3:12; 21:22-23). It will be named with a Heavenly City as the Bride of Christ (Rev. 3:12; 21:1-2, 9; Rev 19:6-8), and named with the coming King Himself (Rev. 3:12; 19). Further, it is the contention of this paper that the armies of Heaven include the redeemed and glorified Church, wearing white robes and crowns (Rev. 3:4; 4:2-4; 6:9-11; 7:9-10, 13-14; 19:11-14; 22:12-14) and coming to the rescue of a nation and people ready to enter the millennial

promises of the Old Testament. More broadly, the thesis of this paper is that the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 include the glorified Church and that this designation lends credibility to a pre-tribulational rapture of the Church.

### ***Presuppositions / Delimitations***

This study presupposes a literal, futuristic dispensational view of Revelation that is decidedly premillennial. Further, it purports to lend credibility to a pre-tribulational rapture. Though these presuppositions may seem to beg the question regarding the identity of the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14, the goal is to exegetically examine this passage with a mind to go where the evidence leads.<sup>1</sup> Being that inductive study has been set forth as the *a priori* method of this study, it is fitting to set forth some of these basic presuppositions from the first chapter of Revelation itself.

Broadly speaking, Revelation 1:1-8 sets the tone of the book as a whole and sets the tone of this study as a whole. Revelation 1:1-2 demonstrates the purpose of this book. It is the revelation, or unveiling of Jesus Christ. This implies it is not therefore a mystery but a clear communication from God to us about the second coming and full manifestation of His Son's glory. Revelation 1:3 reveals the welcomed fact that Revelation is not meant to terrify but to encourage. Revelation 1:4-6, reminds us that regardless of what position one takes regarding the timing of the book, it was revealed by the Triune God to literal churches as an epistle, which makes it relevant to every age. Revelation 1:7 makes it abundantly clear that

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<sup>1</sup> To assert a futurist position at the outset would seem at first glance to answer the question regarding the pre-tribulation rapture. Being that this is an exegetical study, these assumptions do more to demonstrate motivation for the inquiry in the first place.



this book is about a literal future that hasn't happened yet. Revelation 1:8 bolsters this point with the certainty that this literal future will actually come about.

In terms of presuppositions, Revelation 1:7 carries substantial weight. Daniel 7:13-18 speaks of this coming with the clouds, Zechariah 14:1-5, predicts that every eye will see Him, Zechariah 12:9-14, and John 19:33-37 prophetically tell us that His people will see Him as the one whom they pierced, and Matthew 24:27-30 proclaims that the earth and Jerusalem will mourn. Revelation 1:7 speaks of this literal coming and Revelation 19:11-16 shows this literal coming. It is simple, based on these facts alone, to see the non-literal approaches to Revelation as wanting. According to Steve Gregg in his book *Revelation Four Views*: “The most elaborate arguments for an alternative meaning of this verse is presented by some *preterist* commentators, who suggest that the passage does not predict the literal Second Coming, but is a figurative description of Christ’s coming in vengeance to destroy Jerusalem, not in person, but using the Roman armies in A.D. 70.”<sup>2</sup>

The idea that Daniel, Zechariah and Matthew, among others, all pointed forward to a Roman army invading Jerusalem does violence, not only to Revelation 1:7, but to most Old Testament prophecy. For example, is it really reasonable to conclude that Joel is speaking about a Roman army invading Jerusalem to establish the Church when he is speaking about the restoration of Israel? Notice his emphasis on God’s wrath, which is totally consistent with Revelation 14:

Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD. Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 1:7–8.

Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel. "So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it. "And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim. "Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged, for the LORD dwells in Zion.  
(Joel 3:11–21)

His entire emphasis is not the judgment of Israel but the judgment of the nations for the benefit of Israel. To drive the point home, Joel begins the entire section speaking about God's intentions to work on behalf of His people Israel:

For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it. (Joel 3:1–3)

The idea that Revelation 1:8, which is clearly the culmination of Old Testament prophecy leading to the salvation of Israel, is actually about the Roman army invading Jerusalem in AD 70 to destroy Israel and consequently establish the Church, cannot be correct. Further, if the worldwide finality of these passages speaks to a local, limited event why not see the global flood as a local event as well? This is a dangerous precedent, untenable to a student

concerned with a grammatical-historical and decidedly high view of Scripture. The non-literal historical and idealist approaches are even less tenable.

Even still, godly believers can differ on these presuppositions. Because of this fact, it is the goal of this paper to allow the exegesis of Revelation 19:14 to stand on its own.

### ***Methodology***

The research methodology to be employed for this topic will begin with exegesis and move on to theological implications. A simple and helpful definition of exegesis is appropriate at this point. By exegesis, this author means a study of the biblical text in its original language (in this case *Koine* Greek) to bring out from the text the author's intended meaning in its intended context. In order to ensure a true *inductive* handling of the text is carried out, this study will begin with an exegetical analysis of Revelation 19:14 with specific emphasis given to context in the larger theme of Revelation as a whole. Sources representing all four views (preterist, historical, idealist, and futurist) viewpoints will be used throughout the study.

In a seeming obscure topic such as this one, it is important to keep the focus narrow and the conclusions straightforward. Because this study requires some very specific presuppositions regarding the nature of the Church and Israel, it is decidedly narrow already. With an emphasis on the Futurist position, it becomes very narrow indeed. This limits the amount of impact a study like this can have. A Preterist or an Idealist, for example, will likely find the questions posed here to be irrelevant, though one would hope they would shed

some light on their own exegetical insufficiencies regarding the literalness of Revelation as a whole. That said, it is the hope of this writer that the unpretentious tone, exegetical precision and theological diligence of this paper would motivate the Church as to her glorious role in the redemption of Israel.

### *Summary*

Is the Church included in the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14? If it is, does this lend credibility to the pre-tribulational rapture position? A comprehensive study of the text in question is the goal of this study.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

If one were to type in the words “*Armies of Heaven*”, *Church* in Google, the first article to come up is one by a non-denominational pastor answering the thesis question posed above. The anonymous questioner asks:

I am confused as I have always been taught and believed that it was the Church who came back with Christ in Rev 19:14. You stated that the armies of Heaven, called Holy ones would be with Him and the Church, as the bride, would be in the New Jerusalem at this time and would arrive later. The ones who accompany Christ is described in Rev 19:14 as being dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Earlier in verses 7 and 8 the bride is described as wearing fine linen, bright and clean (NIV). Can you clarify this for me?<sup>3</sup>

The questioner appears to take the thesis position of this paper that the armies of Heaven wearing fine linen are the coronated glorified Church riding with Christ to the defense of believers at the end of The Great Tribulation. According to the pastor who runs the site, this belief is the traditional one, but he disagrees.<sup>4</sup> He answers with an appeal to exegesis:

The Greek word translated “armies” refers to soldiers and guardsmen, and the fact that these are armies “of” heaven implies that heaven is their origin. The ones who most accurately fit the description belong to the great body of warrior angels, such as those who were standing by to defend the Lord on the night of His arrest (Matt. 26:53).

Angels are also described as being dressed in brilliant white in John 20:12 and Acts 1:10. And in Rev. 19:8 the brightness of the Bride’s garment comes from the Greek word “*lampros*” which means “shining, or magnificent”, but in Rev. 19:14 the whiteness of the clothing worn by the armies of Heaven is a different Greek word,

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<sup>3</sup> “Who Are The Armies Of Heaven? - Gracethrufaith”. Gracethrufaith. N.p., 2016. Web. 8 Dec. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

“leukos”, which means a brilliant white. You would think that if the same clothing was being referenced John would have used the same word.<sup>5</sup>

Whether he is correct in his analysis remains to be seen, but what can be plainly stated at the outset that there is an exegetical argument worth examining in Revelation 19:14. This example epitomizes the worth of this study even as it illustrates the exegetical agenda ahead. Do the Greek words τὰ στρατεύματα, translated *armies*, only refer to soldiers and guardsmen as stated above, and does that have bearing on whether or not the Church can be in view? Does the dative ἐν, referred to preclude the Church from being in view or can this only be referring to angels? Do the λευκοῖς, or *white* garments, of these armies in Revelation 19:14 indicate they are different from the λαμπρόν, or *bright* garments, of Revelation 9:8? This paper seeks to answer questions of this nature.

Not everyone sees the importance of this question however. Paige Patterson, a leading Baptist scholar, skips the question and moves on to other things in his *New American Commentary*.<sup>6</sup> Robert Mounce, scholar and translator for numerous Bible translations, takes a similar tack in his *New American Commentary on the New Testament*, taking one sentence to address the issue, stating that it could be both angels and men but saying nothing more.<sup>7</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, professor of New Testament studies at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, continues this pattern in his *Anchor Bible Commentary*, using just one sentence to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Paige Patterson, *The New American Commentary*. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012, 348.

<sup>7</sup> Mounce is essentially saying that normally one would conclude the army to be made up of angels but based on Revelation 17:14 this army would be also made up of martyrs from the Tribulation (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, 354.)

settle on the combination view of an army of both angels and men.<sup>8</sup> Richard C. H. Lenski, a German born Lutheran scholar, follows suite in his *Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, where after acknowledging there is indeed a debate as to the identity of the armies, uses three sentences to settle the issue by the “analogy of Scripture,” saying that angels alone are in view.<sup>9</sup> Simon Kistemaker, past president of the Evangelical Theological Society, uses his *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, to set aside an entire paragraph to agree with Mounce and Patterson that the armies are made up of both saints and angels.<sup>10</sup>

In each case, after these commentators make this decision, they move on without any time spent on the theological ramifications of their designation. The most obvious implication of this study has to do with the idea of more than one Resurrection. If the armies of Heaven are made up of glorified men and angels then surely there must be more than one general Resurrection. Though some of the more exegetical commentaries, such as G.K. Beale's, *New International Greek Testament Commentary*,<sup>11</sup> David E. Aune's, *Word Biblical*

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<sup>8</sup> Ford quotes Yadin from Qumran (1QM 12:7-9 (D-S) who at one point remarks “the elect of the Holy people” would fight side by side with angels and leaves it there (J. Massingberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, pg 320.)

<sup>9</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963, pg 555.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Kistemaker, and William Hendriksen. *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001, pg 522.

<sup>11</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 960.

*Commentary*,<sup>12</sup> or Grant Osborne's, *Baker Exegetical Commentary*,<sup>13</sup> spend a bit more time on the subject, none spends any time discussing the ramifications this saintly army has upon the premillennial-pre-trib position.

How could this be? It seems impossible that an issue such as this could be so ignored. What could cause such a lack of interest? Could it be a simple case of theology driving exegesis or in this case theology driving the lack of exegesis? Perhaps.

From proximity alone Revelation 19 is overshadowed by Revelation 20 as a theological battle ground. Where premillennial dispensationalists see more than one general resurrection followed by a literal thousand year Messianic reign on earth the traditional Reformed position, on the other hand, as set forth in the Westminster Confession, is that there is one general resurrection and one day of judgment for all: "At the last day [when Christ returns], such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up.... The bodies of the unjust shall ... be raised to dishonor: the bodies of the just ... unto honor" (WCF, 32.2-3; cf. Larger Catechism, 87).<sup>14</sup> The Westminster Confession goes on to say that there shall be "a day" when "all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ" and be judged (33.1), after which "the righteous [will] go into everlasting life" and "the wicked ... will be cast into eternal torments" (33.2).

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<sup>12</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1059.

<sup>13</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 684.

<sup>14</sup> Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*: Edinburgh Edition (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851).



To recognize that the Reformed orientation opposes multiple resurrections and days of judgment at the outset is to recognize the theological shadow Revelation 19:14 sits under. It further emphasizes the shadow the battle of Revelation 20 casts upon any real debate regarding the exegesis of Revelation 19:14. Beale is one of many to remark that “The precise thematic and temporal relationship of ch. 20 to ch. 19 is hotly debated.”<sup>15</sup> Osborne goes even further stating that Revelation 20 “is easily the best-known portion of the book as well as one of the most divisive passages in the Bible.”<sup>16</sup>

Establishing the importance of Revelation 20 does not even emphasize the theological lines that must be drawn before even getting to it. Kendell Easley in his *Holman New Testament Commentary*, introduces Revelation 20 with the analogy of a complex puzzle reliant on decisions made at the beginning: “The most challenging task of all lies at the beginning: deciding which side of the puzzle is to be worked and then trying to turn the pieces in the right direction so that the pieces can be fit together.”<sup>17</sup> After comparing Revelation 20 to a puzzle with two different solutions, he seems to suggest that initial theological presuppositions will drive the exegesis of this battle ground text. He writes: “Given the history of the debate on these verses, it is safe to say that the solution offered by

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<sup>15</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 972.

<sup>16</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 696.

<sup>17</sup> Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation*, vol. 12, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 367.

some one often seems to depend almost entirely on which way the pieces are “turned up” at the beginning.”<sup>18</sup>

It is the opinion of this author that the theological dilemma of Revelation 20 sucks the air out of any debate or serious theological examination of Revelation 19:14. Steve Gregg in his work *Revelation Four Views*, a work seeking to compare and contrast the four major theological viewpoints of Revelation, seems the perfect commentator to underscore the weight and theological investment in Revelation 20. He begins noting that theology, or more accurately theological presuppositions, bear considerable weight in the book as a whole:

Our study of Revelation to this point has taken the form of a comparison of four interpretive approaches to the judgment events prophesied in chapters 4 through 19. The respective approaches proceed upon entirely different assumptions about the time frame, the geographical extent, and the duration of the judgments depicted as seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath.<sup>19</sup>

He goes on to remark upon the fact that Revelation 20 is the chief controversy in eschatological studies:

For many readers, however, the most interesting question to be resolved in the Book of Revelation concerns the meaning of the final chapters, and particularly chapter 20. Unfortunately for our adopted arrangement, the four categories considered throughout our treatment thus far cannot be applied to these final chapters (just as it could not in the opening three chapters). This is not because there is unanimity among interpreters upon these chapters—on the contrary, the interpretation of these final chapters comprises what is arguably the chief controversy in eschatological studies, if not in all evangelical theology<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 458.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

In light of observations such as those above, commentators and theologians can be forgiven in overlooking the ramifications of Revelation 19:14. The sheer gravity of the debate in Revelation 20 a mere handful of verses later makes Revelation 19:14 look to be a rather pedestrian passage. Having said that, Revelation 19:14 is no less important in its theological implications. It is the hope of this writer that these implications will be apparent. These derived theological conclusions will be discussed in chapter 4, which deals with the implications of the exegetical analysis of chapter 3. For now, it seems enough to say that the ramifications of this study seem to be noteworthy even in the face of an apparent lack of real discussion on the exegesis from some of the more exegetical commentators.

Finally, before moving on, it is important to address the commentators who do attempt to make a scriptural case regarding the identity of the armies of Heaven in line with the thesis of this paper. Warren Weirsbe, in his *Bible Exposition Commentary*, though not spending any more time than any of the other commentators, makes a brief but Scriptural case for this army being made up of more than angels.<sup>21</sup> He cites 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and 2 Thessalonians 1:10 as possible proof of this fact. In 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 the apostle Paul writes:

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:11–13)

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<sup>21</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 618.

Ryrie, in his aptly named *Ryrie Study Bible*, agrees with Weirsbe that Paul is “probably” referring in this verse to the holy men spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 4:14.<sup>22</sup> Ryrie, for his part, seems to be cautiously suggesting in his citation of 1 Thessalonians 4:14 that Revelation 19:14 is possibly about an army populated by the Church: “Probably refers here to angels who will accompany the return of Christ (Mark 8:38), or possibly also holy men (cf. 4:14).”<sup>23</sup>

In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 Paul writes: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” This is hardly a closed case in either verse cited but it does demonstrate that the idea of saints in the army of Christ is not an unheard of concept in the larger corpus of Scripture.

Weirsbe’s, 2 Thessalonians 1:10 reference is less helpful but still leaves the door open for the thesis of this paper. In 2 Thessalonians 1:10 Paul writes: “when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.” In this case, the concept of God being glorified in His saints at His coming could be a reference to the coming of His saints but the verse could just as easily be referring merely to the coming of God being glorified in His saints who are waiting for Him on earth. This verse is probably not the best place to support this thesis, which leaves Weirsbe’s brief argument reliant on one reference with Ryrie adding one to make it two. Though neither Weirsbe nor Ryrie are going out of their way to argue for the thesis of

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Expanded, Accordance electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), n.p

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

this paper, it is apparent that even a cursory look into the subject yields at least some noteworthy results.

Perhaps the most overt reference to the armies of Heaven being more than angels comes from Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton in their *Handbook on the Revelation to John*. In it they state plainly that these armies constitute the saints spoken of in the same chapter:

*The armies of heaven:* at first glance it seems that these are angels; but the fact that they are dressed in fine linen, white and pure (see verse 8), indicates that these are the victorious martyrs (see similar descriptions in 3:5; and verse 7:14). And in 17:14 the soldiers of the conquering Lamb are his faithful followers. Like their leader, they also ride white horses.<sup>24</sup>

Their evidence is contextual from Revelation and is a great starting place for the next chapter on exegesis. For as much as these commentators have made reference to their opinions on the matter, this paper is not about the case made by commentators but the case made by this author from the text itself. To that end an examination of the Greek text will be the next logical place to begin.

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<sup>24</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 281.

### Chapter 3

#### *Exegetical Analysis*

καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐφ' ἵπποις λευκοῖς,  
ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν. (Revelation 19:14)<sup>25</sup>

“And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on  
white horses.” (Revelation 19:14 ESV)

Revelation 19:14 is not a controversial text exegetically speaking. There are no giant decisions to be made, no variant textual problems to decipher or any real controversy about translation. It is, in a paper like this one, a seemingly unexciting text to examine in isolation. That is before the unanticipated intrusion of a reference to “armies of Heaven” in the midst of a description of Christ riding a white horse however. This intrusion causes this text to become a decidedly more exciting one based on its context alone. The larger context is a description of Christ that begins in 19:13 and picks up again in 19:15 and continues to 19:16.<sup>26</sup> The interruption that is 19:14 is impossible to miss once it is noted:

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ***And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.*** 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. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation 19:13–16 ESV)

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<sup>25</sup> Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (with Morphology) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993; 2006), Rev 19:14.

<sup>26</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1059.

This intrusion to describe the physical appearance of the armies of Heaven is not totally without reason however. Earlier in 19:6-9 a description of the glorified Church is given where her raiment is emphasized. In 19:8 it is emphasized that the Bride of Christ was granted to clothe herself with βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν, or *fine linen, bright and pure*. The phrase in 19:14 is virtually identical, except the word λευκὸν, or *white*, in 19:14 is exchanged for the word λαμπρὸν, *bright*, in 19:8. Not only is this fine linen emphasized in 19:8 but it is given a further clarification in 19:8 that “the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” The inclusion of 19:14 is less shocking and obscure in light of this rich emphasis a mere six verses earlier.

*Evaluation:*

Though Revelation 19:14 remains an uncomplicated exegetical sentence, its place within the larger context describing Christ, beginning in 19:13 and continuing to 19:16, combined within the larger context of the description of the Bride in 19:6-9, makes this a noteworthy exegetical puzzle. It is the hope of this writer that a straightforward exegetical analysis of this passage might shed light upon the definite future place of the Church alongside Christ at the Second Advent.

Having established the noteworthiness of 19:14 in the immediate context of 19:13-16 and the suggestive larger context of 19:6-9 it seems prudent to look for exegetical clues in 19:14 as to John’s intended purpose in bringing up this army and the relevance of their outfits.

## καὶ

Revelation 19:14 begins with a continuative copulative conjunction καὶ, translated as *and*, binding this sentence to the previous one. In English it is not typical to begin a sentence with a conjunction but in *Koine* Greek it is both typical and uncontroversial to begin a sentence this way.<sup>27</sup> This continuative conjunction is so pedestrian a way to begin a sentence that many commentators leave it untranslated. Wallace is a prime example of this. In his NET notes, the phrase “Here καί (*kai*) has not been translated because of differences between Greek and English style,” is so ubiquitous it seems to explain the introduction of virtually every verse in his translation.<sup>28</sup> Having said that, it is important to keep in mind that an continuative conjunction is meant to link the entire clause with the previous one. This simple fact reminds the astute reader that though 19:14 is different than both 19:13 and 19:15 in its subject matter it is grammatically linked in the flow of John’s thoughts.

### *Evaluation*

The continuative copulative conjunction καὶ, serves to link Revelation 19:14 to the previous verse, subsequently reinforcing the idea of the relationship of this verse to the larger context of 19:13-16. Being that Revelation 19:13-16 is focused on describing Christ’s appearance, the idea that 19:14 is also about a description seems a modest point. The fact that this description is about the armies of Heaven and not about Christ particularly suggests that the description of this force must be related to the description of Christ. Again, the near

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<sup>27</sup> Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Mt 7:28, 9:10, 11:1, 13:53, 26:1.

<sup>28</sup> Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Re 19:14.



context of Revelation 19:6-9, and the vivid description of the glorified Bride of Christ seems to contextually provide the link between the two.

It is the opinion of this author that the description of Christ and the description of the armies of Heaven can be related as one subject because the Bride of Christ has been shown to be one with the bridegroom Himself a mere six verses earlier.

### **τὰ στρατεύματα**

The term τὰ στρατεύματα follows after the introductory conjunction και, and is translated *the armies*.<sup>29</sup> This articular nominative is plural, moving the expression beyond that of one singular army with a plurality of soldiers to the idea of plural armies made up of soldiers from more than one group. The genitive plural στρατοπέδων, is used to speak of foreign armies surrounding Jerusalem to battle in the end in Luke 21:20, again, expressing the fact that armies made up of more than one group were involved. Hebrews 11:34 speaks in the same way referring to foreign encampments in the plural sense with the word παρεμβολὰς being translated as armies. This is not to say that the reference to τὰ στρατεύματα in Revelation 19:14, is speaking about vastly unrelated groups but that the reference simply shows the gathering of more than one gathered group under the same flag. Friberg, Friberg, and Miller in their *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, translate τὰ στρατεύματα, as “a smaller detachment of soldiers corps, band of soldiers, armed

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<sup>29</sup>Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 549.

force.”<sup>30</sup> This is consistent with the plural στρατεύματα, in Revelation 19:19 to speak of the Beast and the kings of the earth with their armies respectively gathered to make war against Him who was sitting on the horse and “His army.” Revelation 19:19 refers to τὰ στρατεύματα, *the armies* (plural) of Christ in Revelation 19:14 as His στρατεύματος, *army* (singular) in 19:19. This interchangeability seems to be based on what is being emphasized. In 19:14 the size and shape of the gathered mass is being described, while in 19:19 the same is true regarding the size and scope of the beast and the kings’ armies but when speaking of the singular in 19:19 regarding Christ’s army, the idea of His leadership is being emphasized.

The usage of this word group is rather fluid and so the reference to plural στρατεύματα and to a singular στρατεύματος in speaking of the same group is uncontroversial. Otto Bauernfeind, a German protestant theologian heavily influenced by Josephus, expresses this well when he writes that:

στρατός seems to be originally a part. (verbal adj.) of the root ster-<sup>1</sup> “to spread,” hence first “spread out camp,” then “army.” Hom. uses the word 64 times in this sense, and 3 times the derived verb (ἀμφ-) εστρατόωντο “they lay in the field,” Il., 11, 713. The meaning “army” became the norm. In accounts of the deeds of individual heroes of the earlier period, the stem στρατο- found only limited use. But when the ref. was to the achievements of larger groups it was employed more often and led to several derivatives and constructs.<sup>31</sup>

According to Kittel there are eight different ways this word group is used:

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker’s Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 357.

<sup>31</sup> Otto Bauernfeind, “Στρατεύομαι, Στρατεία, Στρατιά, Στρατεύμα, Στρατιώτης, Συστρατιώτης, Στρατηγός, Στρατόπεδον, Στρατολογέω,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 701–702.

From the basic *stratós*, denoting a camp or army, the first derivative is *strateúō*, “to undertake a campaign,” “to serve in the army.” 2. We then find *strateía*, meaning “campaign” or “military service.” 3. Also found is *stratiá* for “army” or superterrestrial “host.” 4. *strateúma* is mostly used for an “army division.” 5. The individual on military service is a *strateuómenos*, but *stratiótēs* also comes into use. This word can take on adverse connotations when it comes to denote first the professional and then the mercenary, especially among those who favor a citizen army. At the same time professionals prove their worth, and the term is often used in a good sense, as is *systratiótēs* for “comrade-in-arms.” 6. The *stratēgós* is the “military leader,” who may also have high political importance in antiquity. The noun *stratēgia* means “leading the army,” “tactics,” “the office of general,” and “generalship.” 7. The *stratópedon* is the site of the *stratós*, i.e., the “camp” or “campsite.” 8. The term *stratologéō* means “to enlist for military service.”<sup>32</sup>

All eight of these examples are about military service and non civilian gatherings. At first glance, in thinking through the ramifications that the armies of Heaven could include the Church, it is difficult to see how this exclusive military group could at the same time include the women and children that make up a portion of the Church today.

It is important to remember that the Church will have changed by the time it could effectively be called an army of Heaven. At this point in time men and women seem very unlike the angelic host of Heaven but Jesus solves this problem in speaking to the Sadducees telling them that, “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven (Matthew 22:30).” This statement obviously says nothing about the military nature of the resurrected saints but it does indicate that the Church will look very different than it does today.

In the LXX the term ἐπεστράτευσαν, translates the the Hebrew term נָלָח as *fight* in Isaiah 29:7. This Hebrew term is used 14 times in the Hebrew Bible to mean *to fight, to*

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<sup>32</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1091–1093.

do battle, or to serve in the temple.<sup>33</sup> The word  $\text{צְבָא}$  is used 487 times to mean, “army, host, divisions (of an army); as a title of God: of Hosts (the heavenly armies), the Almighty, with a focus on great power to conquer or rule, or as an extension of the leader of a great army.”<sup>34</sup>

It is fascinating that the same word can be used to speak about the host of Heaven as well as service in the temple. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT),  $\text{צְבָא}$  has to do, not only with fighting, it has also wider use in the sense of rendering service.<sup>35</sup> For example, it is used for the Levites in the tent of meeting in Numbers 4:23 and 8:24. The TWOT goes on to say that:

No doubt service for Yahweh is seen as involving total dedication and careful regimentation, and since God is Yahweh of hosts, enthroned between the cherubim housed inside the tent of meeting, work associated with the tent may be considered spiritual war. In Ex 38:8 and 1 Sam 2:22 a participle refers to the women who ministered at the door of the tent of meeting.<sup>36</sup>

This opens wide the idea that the resurrected Church could indeed consist of more than warriors and soldiers in the traditional sense.

When  $\text{צְבָא}$  is translated as host(s) it can refer to any arrayed army (Jud 4:2), the inhabitants of heaven (1 Kgs 22:19), or the celestial bodies (Deut 4:19).<sup>37</sup> What is interesting is how flexible this designation can be when it comes to the people of God. For example the Israelites in their wilderness journey were numbered in armies by their tribal units, according

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<sup>33</sup> Kohlenberger/Mounce *Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, n.p.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> R. Laird Harris, Editor; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Associate Editor; Bruce K. Waltke, Associate Editor, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1980.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

to Numbers 1:52. TWOT explains that, even though it was the nation of Israel that bore arms, it was Yahweh as head of their armies who fought for them.<sup>38</sup> In a sense, as Israel was arrayed in companies representing the army of God they were fighting alongside all the forces of Heaven. In this way, the idea of God's people and God's angels fighting in one army has a definite Old Testament precedent. In fact, unless God Himself, the head of all the armies of existence, went to battle alongside Israel's army, the effort would end in failure. David's boast to Goliath encompasses this idea well: "Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied (1 Samuel 17:45). Though God is the Lord of angels in His army, David points out to Goliath that He is at the same time Lord of the armies of Israel. This is a significant remark by David. According to the TWOT:

Yahweh of Hosts is a special name for God. Yahweh and אֱלֹהִים occur with זְבָאוֹת some 285 times (based on Mandelkern most frequently in Isa (62), Jer (77), Hag (14), Zech (53) and Mal (24). It is absent from the Pentateuch. Most often the word זְבָאוֹת follows Yahweh, around 261 times; after אֱלֹהֵי, 18 times; after אֱלֹהִים, 6 times. There is often a building of divine titles as: יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, 37 occurrences; זְבָאוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי, 13 (with article 3, + אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, 3 times; + אֲדֹנָי 1); יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים זְבָאוֹת, 4; אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַזְּבָאוֹת, 20 (1 with article); אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת (5 הָאֲדֹנָי), Amos 3:13; יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵיהֶם (or אֱלֹהֵינוּ 2, or אֱלֹהֵי 2).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> R. Laird Harris, Editor; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Associate Editor; Bruce K. Waltke, Associate Editor, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1980.

For David to use this special divine title and equate it to include not only the gathered angels but the armies of Israel is no small thing. The idea that the armies of Heaven could be a combination of angels and resurrected individuals seems very plausible in this light.

### *Evaluation*

The plural reference to armies is suggestive of more than one group of people gathered together under one commander. The Old Testament references to the nation of Israel as God's army combined with the flexible way in which this description is rendered, including temple servants and women and children, suggests the likelihood that the Church could be in view here, if not exclusively at least alongside the angelic host. If angelic armies could be equated with the armies of Israel in the Old Testament how much more is it reasonable to see angelic armies equated with the resurrected Church in the New Testament, especially in light of the immediate context of the description? Based on the overt references to the Church and her outfit in Revelation 19:8 and the similar description of the armies in 19:14 and based on the Old Testament precedent of equating armies of angels with the people of God, it seems that the interpreter wanting to show that the armies of Heaven are exclusively angels has the harder task.

### τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ

The phrase τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, is an appositional construction where τὰ acts as a second substantive to τὰ στρατεύματα.<sup>40</sup> It is the armies that are the subject of this clause and they are ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, *in Heaven*, or *of Heaven*, depending on how ἐν is handled. The syntactic structure implies that εἰσὶν is necessary to be read in conjunction with ἐν, so that it is the armies that (*are*) in Heaven being spoken of.<sup>41</sup> The word ἐν, is a preposition of location and could be translated *of*, *in*, or *from* to show the physical relationship of the armies to Heaven.<sup>42</sup> So then it is the armies that are *of*, *in* or *from* τῷ οὐρανῷ that we are speaking of. To speak of the armies *from* Heaven makes sense but seems to put too much emphasis on the location of the armies, where the armies *in* Heaven tends to emphasize their current position. Being that the armies are seen to be following Christ, the word *of* seems to be the best choice. This is the choice made by the ESV translation but the KJV, the NET, and the NASB use the word *in* instead. Regardless the key seems to be that these armies are from Heaven not earth. But what is meant by Heaven? Is John speaking of the armies that are from the sky or from the abode of God?

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<sup>40</sup>An appositional construction involves two adjacent substantives that refer to the same person or thing and have the same syntactical relation to the rest of the clause. The second substantive is said to be in apposition to the first. Normally, both substantives will be in the same case. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 62.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

In the New Testament there is a physical sense where οὐρανῶ can mean the “over-arching, all-embracing heaven beneath which is the earth and all that is therein.”<sup>43</sup> In Matthew, Jesus refers to “the birds of the οὐρανοῦ,” (Matt. 6:26; 8:20; 13:32). He likewise refers the “clouds of οὐρανοῦ,” in Matthew and “the earth and οὐρανοῦ,” in Luke (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Lk. 12:56). It is the place where rain is formed in James and where the sun, moon and stars are placed in Mark and Hebrews (Jam. 5:18; Mk. 13:25; Heb. 11:12).

John used the word often to speak of the peculiar place of God. In John 3:13 Jesus speaks of τὸν οὐρανὸν as the place He descended from and the place that He will ascend to. In verse 31 of the same chapter John distinguishes οὐρανοῦ as distinct from the earth, as the place where Jesus came from (Jn. 3:31). In John 6:32 Jesus refers to the bread from οὐρανοῦ as the bread from God Himself and six verses later says that οὐρανοῦ is the same place He has come from (Jn. 6:32, 38). The conversation continues in the rest of chapter six where the Jews grumble at the claim to deity being made by Jesus and His reference to being Himself, ὁ ἄρτος ὁ καταβὰς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, or the Bread that came down from Heaven (Jn. 6:41).

According to the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (EDNT), οὐρανός is an ubiquitous term in the New Testament:

It is no wonder that οὐρανός is among the frequently used words in the NT. A preference for it in the narrative writings is discernible (Matthew has 82 occurrences, Luke 35, Acts 26, Mark 19, John 18, Acts 52), while usage in the discursive epistolary literature is less prominent (the authentic Pauline letters have 11 occurrences, Ephesians and Colossians 9, Hebrews 10, 2 Peter 6). Among the 274 occurrences, 91

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<sup>43</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).



are found in the pl., which was unknown to secular Greek writers; it may have entered NT usage via the LXX. The reasons for this may have been the translation of Heb. *šāmayim*, the plerophory of hymnic and doxological style, or simply oriental influence. An unambiguous rule cannot be discerned. Worthy of mention are the unique expressions used by Matthew: πατήρ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (15 occurrences) and βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (32 occurrences).<sup>44</sup>

In English the word *sky* is decidedly less supernatural than the word Heaven. Using the less weighty *sky* makes it easier for english speakers to differentiate what is being spoken of. In the Bible the οὐρανοῦ is used to speak of both ideas, leaving context to settle the issue. This regularity of usage to designate something as normal as the sky above and in other cases being used to designate the very abode of God is perhaps explained by the society in which these terms were used. The EDNT gives a possible reason that this came about:

Among the conditions for understanding οὐρανός are the sociocultural factors of the ancient worldview, in which the NT Scriptures are steeped. That which had power over humans and lay beyond their control was heaven, the heavenly, or in heaven. “Below” and the things that are “below” were defined in contradistinction to “above.” Thus the world can become the counterpart or opposite of heaven. A prefigured primal image or antitype to heaven is reflected in earthly events.<sup>45</sup>

This fascinating idea brings color to the idea of Christ who is from above, for God and Heaven literally would belong together.<sup>46</sup>

### *Evaluation*

The word οὐρανοῖς is the place where John sees the throne of God in Revelation 4:2. It is also the place where Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 8:1). In

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<sup>44</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 543.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Revelation 19:1 it is the place of the great multitude crying out in praise to God. It is also the place where the Bride of Christ is clothed in white (Rev. 19:7-8). It is the place that is opened up in 19:11 revealing a white horse ridden by Christ followed by an army dressed in white (Rev. 19:11-14). If the first advent represented Heaven itself coming to earth in the person of Jesus than the second advent may well represent Heaven itself coming to earth in the person of Jesus and His saints.

### **ἡκολούθει αὐτῷ**

The armies of Heaven ἡκολούθει αὐτῷ, *were following Him*. ἡκολούθει, is the main verb of the sentence and it is an imperfect, active, indicative in the the third person singular.<sup>47</sup> As a verb it describes the action of the armies of Heaven. As an imperfect it tells the reader that this action was a continuous action in the past tense.<sup>48</sup> This imperfect tense is interesting because it is speaking about a vision of the future. Beale notes the natural fluidity of this section and offers a helpful commentary:

Note the alternating use of past, present, and future tenses in vv 14–16: “was following ... goes forth ... he will shepherd ... he will trample ... he has.” Since the vision is clearly predictive, the present tenses may be “future presents” or preferably prophetic “historical presents.” Such shifts appear natural for a seer recording visions seen in the past but predicting future events<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, Mark Dubis, and J. Ted Blakley, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament, SBL Edition: Expansions and Annotations* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011), Re 19:14.

<sup>48</sup> Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Lexham Press, 2013; 2013).

<sup>49</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 961.

Based on the fluid tense changes employed by John, the continuous action of following appears to be the important aspect emphasized by John rather than the historical nature of following in the past. John uses the active voice to show that the armies were performing the action of following, and the indicative mood is used to show that the scene was really happening as opposed to a possible action or intention of the army.<sup>50</sup>

The word αὐτῷ modifies ἡκολούθει as a personal pronoun functioning as a dative object which according to Wallace is functionally similar to an accusative.<sup>51</sup> It's antecedent is the rider on the white horse three verses earlier, the Word of God Himself from the previous verse (Rev. 19:11, 13).

To summarize, the armies of Heaven were seen to be actively following the rider on the white horse. ἡκολούθει is also in the singular likely emphasizing that even though there were plural armies they were one group following Christ.

The term ἡκολούθει is used here in a somewhat unique way. According to EDNT:

Of 90 occurrences in the NT only 11 are found outside the Gospels (4 in Acts, 6 in Revelation, and 1 in 1 Cor 10:4). In the Gospels ἀκολουθέω stands primarily as a term for discipleship to Jesus. Apart from the Gospels only Rev 14:4; 19:14 speak of Christ (as “the Lamb” or the victorious “King of kings”). Altogether 73 of the 90 occurrences of the vb. refer to being a disciple of Jesus (or Christ).<sup>52</sup>

In the case of Revelation 19:14 and 14:4, the word ἡκολούθει seems to have less to do with discipleship and more to do physically with coming behind Jesus or pursuing Him in His

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 171-174.

<sup>52</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 49.

goal. According to BDAG the verb may have both discipleship and physically following in mind when Jesus is the object.<sup>53</sup> Having said that, it strains the normal reading of the word to imbue it with the idea of discipleship. The sense seems to be the same as when Peter ἀκολουθεί the angel out of prison in Acts 12:8, or when the receptive Jews ἠκολούθησαν Paul and Barnabas in 13:43, or the crowd ἠκολούθει after Paul at his arrest in 21:36. Both instances, discipleship and literally following, seem to be present. In John 1:37-38 the two disciples ἠκολούθησαν Jesus in 1:37, taking on the dual meaning of joining Him as disciples, and the physical nature of actually ἀκολουθοῦντας behind Him as He walked along in 1:38. This same sense could be in view regarding the armies of Heaven but the simpler physical description seems the least forced.

#### *Evaluation*

Though it may be about discipleship, in this instance the clause ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ is likely a straightforward description of the physical act of the armies of Heaven literally following behind Jesus. The significance of this verse is probably not due to the verb in this sentence. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the larger context of description in 19:13-16 seems to project where the emphasis in this sentence ought to be seen. In other words, it is not the description of what the armies of Heaven were doing per se but in what they were wearing that is most significant in John's description.

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<sup>53</sup> BAGD W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature* (2012)

## ἐφ' ἵπποις λευκοῖς

Keeping in mind the fact that the section from 19:13-16 is a description of Christ, the description of the armies in 19:14 seems to hold the most significance. The first most obvious clue as to the significance of this verse is likely the description of how the armies were following Christ. They were following Him ἐφ' ἵπποις λευκοῖς, *on white horses*.

The word ἐφ is either a preposition of location or a preposition of means.<sup>54</sup> In this instance a preposition of means seems the safer bet. The horses are the means of them following, or better, the way that they were following Christ.<sup>55</sup>

The words ἵπποις λευκοῖς of Revelation 19:14 have been seen already in Revelation 19:11 describing the singular ἵππος λευκός of Christ. The word ἵπποις is plural and is translated as horses here. The horse is a beast of military importance in ancient Israel. According to the TDNT:

From the time of the Hyksos (c. 1700) the horse is of military importance in Egypt for drawing chariots, and in this capacity it is capable of limited use on the Palestinian plains. According to the OT it is first found in Egypt and then in Canaan (Gn. 47:17; Ex. 9:3; 14:9; Dt. 17:16; Ez. 17:15). Egypt introduced horses to Palestine at an early period, though horses from Asia Minor may also have been known and used for warlike purposes in Palestine<sup>56</sup>

The horse also carried a fierce connotation of warfare and strength in the Bible. TDNT goes on to describe the horse as a symbol of alien power.<sup>57</sup> The LXX translates οἱ ἵπποι as ἵπποις, or

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<sup>54</sup> Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 369, 371, 373-374, 389.

<sup>55</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary* (Lexham Press, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> Otto Michel, “ἵππος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 336.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

horses in Hosea 1:7 and implies that they are powerful in such a way that God is glorified in putting them into a dead sleep. Horses bring military confidence which is why Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem the first time on the back of a donkey rather than the powerful, warlike horse (Mk. 11:1). He was not coming to conquer a geopolitical landscape but to conquer death in His sacrifice on the cross. When He comes the second time He is coming to geopolitically take ground and the warlike horse emphasizes this.<sup>58</sup> Further, the book of Revelation uses horses repeatedly in its imagery. In Revelation 6, the four horses of the apocalypse are depicted bringing conquest and hardship to the unbelieving world. The demonic locusts of Revelation 9 are compared to horses, and in 14:20 the terrible wrath of God's judgement is measured by how high the blood rises on a horse's bridle.

In Revelation 6:2 the rider on the ἵππος λευκός, coming forth to conquer is believed by most futurists to be the imposter Antichrist, aping the white horse of Christ, presenting himself as a false savior to the world.<sup>59</sup> What is significant for this paper is the natural identification of the ἵπποις λευκοῖς with Christ. It seems that the reference is so associated with Christ that some see the rider in 6:2 as Christ Himself. According to Gregg:

There are some *futurists* (e.g., Kuyper, Ladd, Morris), who see this rider on the **white horse** (v. 2) as Christ. Similarly, Ladd interprets this rider as the proclamation of the gospel in all the world. White, he argues, is always a symbol of Christ, something associated with Christ, or of spiritual victory.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 369.

<sup>59</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 103.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

The color λευκοῖς, or *white*, is used in the very same verse to describe the λευκὸν, or linen, of the armies. In both instances it seems obvious that the color described in Revelation 19:14 is synonymous with the λαμπρὸν, or bright linen of the Church in Revelation 19:8. The basic meaning of λευκοῖς, seems to connote a brightness, a shining or a glittering.<sup>61</sup> On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus' clothes became λευκὰ as light (Matt. 17:2), or intensely λευκὰ (Mk. 9:3) or dazzling λευκὰ (Lk. 9:29) depending on which gospel is referenced. The TDNT adds some color to the discussion:

In the sphere of Heb. and Jewish culture, too, white always had a particular significance, as a natural colour (of milk, teeth etc.), or as an artistic colour richly used in ceramics, murals, and frescoes, Gay and varied colours were highly valued on clothes; linens and woollens were dyed, though they were also worn white, and bleached linen (*byssus*) was dear and fashionable. White was predominant for priestly vestments, and was the basic cultic colour in general. Though this was also true in the surrounding world, it is to be explained less in terms of general views and more in terms of the fact that the seriousness and clarity of the OT concept of God helped other basic conceptions to emerge even in the field of the symbolism of colour, including the complete exclusion of black and the predominance of white. What influenced the choice of white was not so much the character of the divine world as light in a more natural sense, but rather the prominence of the concept of holiness. It is also true that “vitality, life, light, holiness, and joy on the one side, and inertia, darkness, evil and sorrow on the other, are interchangeable concepts in the Bible, and white and black are a phenomenal expression of the two series of antitheses.”<sup>62</sup>

It is not a stretch to see that both the horses and the armies themselves are arrayed in such a way to represent the one they follow.

### *Evaluation*

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<sup>61</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>62</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, “Λευκός, Λευκαῖνω,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 242–243.

The white horses ridden by the armies of Heaven are significant in their identification with the one they are following. Thus it seems reasonable that Revelation 19:14 fits within the larger context of Revelation 19:13-16 as a description of Christ's people. Their identification with Him appears to be key. The close proximity of the description of the Bride of Christ in 19:6-9 suggests a oneness of the Bride and Groom as they ride shining against the darkness of the world they are invading. In this scenario the second advent becomes a different kind of light in the darkness (Jn. 1:5), and the Church becomes a different kind of light to the world (Phil. 2:15).

### **ἐνδεδυμένοι**

It has been suggested up to this point that the description of the armies of Heaven is the most significant aspect of Revelation 19:14 due to the similar description of the Church in Revelation 19:8. This description is centered in the clause ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν. The word ἐνδεδυμένοι is a participle modifying the verb ἠκολούθει which, as stated above, is the main verb of the sentence in the imperfect tense, active voice, indicative mood, in the third person, as a singular verb.<sup>63</sup> ἐνδεδυμένοι is thus modifying ἠκολούθει to show how the armies were following Christ. As repeated many times thus far, the descriptive nature of the larger section of Revelation 19:13-16, puts an emphasis on description. It seems to this author that this ought to put an automatic emphasis on this participle and what it describes, especially when its tense is taken into account.

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<sup>63</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, Mark Dubis, and J. Ted Blakley, The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament, SBL Edition: Expansions and Annotations (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011), Re 19:14.



The word ἐνδεδυμένοι, is a participle in the perfect tense. Heiser gives a clear definition of this tense and its usage:

The perfect tense is used by the writer to describe a completed verbal action that occurred in the past but which produced a state of being or a result that exists in the present (in relation to the writer). The emphasis of the perfect is not the past action so much as it is as such but the present “state of affairs” resulting from the past action.<sup>64</sup>

In other words, John is emphasizing the completed action of the armies being clothed at a certain point in the past, with the clothes they are presently wearing in his vision.

This, combined with the fact that ἐνδεδυμένοι is in the middle/passive voice, lends even more credibility to the significance of this participle. The voice is the form of the participle that shows how the subject is related to the action.<sup>65</sup> According to Chapman and Shogren: “There are three voices: active, middle, and passive. The middle/passive forms of the present and perfect tenses have either a middle or passive meaning, to be determined from the context.”<sup>66</sup> If the middle voice is taken, the act of putting on clothing by the armies *themselves* is depicted.<sup>67</sup> If however the passive voice is taken, the armies of Heaven would have been clothed by *an agent other than themselves* at a certain point in the past with the result that at the present moment (of John’s vision) they were clothed the same way. This is significant, for the reader has just been given a description of the Church being so clothed a mere six verses earlier.

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<sup>64</sup> Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Lexham Press, 2013; 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Chapman and Gary Steven Shogren, *Greek New Testament Insert*, 2nd ed., revised. (Quakertown, PA: Stylus Publishing, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

It is interesting to note that Revelation 19:8 also uses a middle/passive voice in describing the Church being περιβάλλεται. The ESV and NASB both use the middle voice. The ESV translating that, “it was granted her to *clothe herself*,” and the NASB translating almost identically that, “it was given to her to clothe herself.”<sup>68</sup> Most other translations seem to prefer the more passive rendering. The NRSV translates with an obvious passive that, “to her it has been granted *to be clothed*.”<sup>69</sup> The NIV translates with a more neutral voice emphasizing the passive verb *given* to translate that the, “fine linen, bright and clean, was given her *to wear*.”<sup>70</sup> The KJV translates with an emphatic emphasis on the passive, translating that, “to her was granted that *she should be arrayed*.”<sup>71</sup> The NET follows suit translating that, “she was permitted *to be dressed*.”<sup>72</sup>

It seems to this author that in both instances (Rev. 19:8 and 19:14) the passive is the better choice. In Revelation 19:8 the word ἐδόθη precedes περιβάλλεται with the obviously passive aorist verb, *given*, coming right after the introductory καὶ.<sup>73</sup> It is apparent that the point of Revelation 19:8 is what God granted to the Church to wear not whether the Church

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<sup>68</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Re 19:8. *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Re 19:8.

<sup>69</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Re 19:8.

<sup>70</sup> *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 19:8.

<sup>71</sup> *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Re 19:8.

<sup>72</sup> Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition*; Bible. English. NET Bible.; *The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Re 19:8.

<sup>73</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, Mark Dubis, and J. Ted Blakley, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament*, SBL Edition: Expansions and Annotations (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011), Re 19:8.

actively put it on. This is consistent with all the translations cited above. They each translated the verb ἐδόθη passively lending weight to the idea of God's action being the key, not the Bride's.

### *Evaluation*

This lends immediate weight to the thesis of this paper. The passive emphasis on God's action to grant the Church to be clothed in fine linen in Revelation 19:8 makes the perfect passive rendering of the participle ἐνδεδυμένοι in Revelation 19:14 impossible to ignore. The saints were clothed by an agent other than themselves at a certain point in the past (Rev. 19:8) with the result that at the present moment (19:14) they were clothed the same way.

That the glorified Church should be identified (at least in part) with the armies of Heaven seems to be the natural conclusion of the basic grammar and context being employed by John. A further description of the actual clothes themselves ought to erase any reasonable doubt that John has the Church in view when he speaks of the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14.

### **βύσσινον**

The triple accusatives, βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, that end Revelation 19:14 have been in view since the introduction of this paper. It has been repeated multiple times that this description of the armies' clothes in Revelation 19:14 is uncannily similar to the βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν of Revelation 19:8. All three adjectives are in the accusative in both

verses. All three are used to describe the clothing of a group of people related to Christ. The close proximity of these virtually similar adjectives make them impossible to ignore.

The word βύσσινον is a substantival adjective and as such functions like a noun.<sup>74</sup> It is in the accusative case which means that it serves as the direct object in relation to the two other accusatives related to the participle ἐνδεδυμένοι discussed above.<sup>75</sup> It is in the neuter gender and the singular person which reinforces the nature of an army or armies dressed as one entity.

The word βύσσινον is translated and is related to the noun βύσσοσ, *fine linen*, and likewise refers to fine linen or cotton material.<sup>76</sup> Smith observes that βύσσοσ “is only used of splendid clothing in the book of Revelation both as an expensive commodity and as the clothing of the righteous.”<sup>77</sup> Two of the four uses of the word in Revelation are in 19:14 and 19:8, the other references are in Revelation 18:12, where the cargo of Babylon the great merchant city is said to consist of, “cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, βυσσίνου, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble.” The other reference is in Revelation 18:16, where Babylon is said to be a great city that “was clothed in βύσσινον” as well as in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold, jewels and pearls.

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<sup>74</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary* (Lexham Press, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Lexham Press, 2013; 2013).

<sup>76</sup> W. Andrew Smith, “Clothing,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

The EDNT finds it apparent that the same clothing worn by the Church in Revelation 19:8 is likewise worn by the armies of Heaven in 19:14, remarking that it is the same, “pure, shining clothing worn by the Church as the Bride of Christ (19:8) and by the heavenly armies that follow Christ (v. 14).<sup>78</sup>

### *Evaluation*

It is a modest statement to observe that the clothing worn by the Church in Revelation 19:8 is identical to that worn by the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14. Though this does not immediately require the Church and the armies of Heaven to be the same group, it does suggest that this is a sensible conclusion. It seems to this writer that to deny this as a suitably basic conclusion ought to require at least some evidence to the contrary.

### **λευκόν**

The second word in the triple-accusative ending of Revelation 19:14 is λευκόν. It, like βύσσινον discussed above, is an adjective in the accusative case, the singular person and the neuter gender. It is related to βύσσινον in an attributive sense, where it serves to compliment the already descriptive force of βύσσινον.<sup>79</sup> It is difficult to be certain of this however because no article is present in the participial clause. According to Wallace:

When no article is present, the relation of adjective to noun is more difficult to ascertain. This type of construction occurs almost 2400 times in the NT, over one

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<sup>78</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 229.

<sup>79</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary* (Lexham Press, 2007).

fourth of all adjective-noun constructions. Conceivably, the anarthrous adjective-noun construction could express either an attributive or predicate relation.<sup>80</sup>

Regardless of this difficulty the meaning of the word itself is less difficult. The word λευκὸν is the same word λευκοῖς, discussed earlier in the same verse.

λευκοῖς was seen to be detailing the color of the horses ridden by the armies of Heaven, translated as *white* with a connotation of brightness or shining or glittering.<sup>81</sup> It is significant that the same word is used both to describe the color of the horses the armies were riding and to describe the color of the fine linen that the armies were wearing.

Without repeating the analysis above it seems prudent to observe that this word is the one difference in the expression in Revelation 19:8 describing the βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν of the Church and the expression in Revelation 19:14 describing the βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν of the armies of Heaven. In Revelation 19:8 the word λαμπρὸν is used rather than the λευκὸν of Revelation 19:14.

λαμπρὸν has the primary sense *to shine*, or transitively *to light up*.<sup>82</sup> The term is used in many ways in Scripture but unique to this thesis is the way the term is used in reference to angels, disciples, and the Lord Himself. In Acts 12:7 ἔλαμψεν, (*shone*) is used to describe the light that appeared in Peter's cell when the angel came to rescue him. Likewise in Luke 2:9, the glory of the Lord περιέλαμψεν (*shone around*) the angel of the

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<sup>80</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 309.

<sup>81</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 497.

Lord as he related the good news of Christ's birth to the shepherds. Matthew 5:15-16 uses the same term to describe the disciples who are to let their light λαμπάτω (*shine*). Jesus is also seen to have ἔλαμψεν on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:2. In Revelation 4:5 the term is used to describe the seven torches, or the star blazing like a torch in 8:10. It is used to paint a picture of the bright river in Revelation 22:1 and to describe Jesus Himself as the bright morning star in 22:16.

Relevant to this paper is also the description of the raiment of His angels clothed in pure bright linen, as they come out with the seven plagues in Revelation 15:6. What is significant however is that this very term associated with the angels in Revelation 15:6 is used overtly to describe the raiment of the Church in Revelation 19:8. Further, the close proximity of Revelation 19:8 to 19:14 serves to undermine the claim that the angels described in 15:6 are in view.

The key in the description of the fine linen as either λαμπρὸν (*bright*) or λευκὸν (*white*) seems to be less about the exact hue of the horses and garments and more about the contrast to the bloody finery of the harlot in Revelation 17-18.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps this is why wearing white is so significant all throughout Revelation. Jesus' hair is said to be λευκαὶ like λευκόν wool in Revelation 1:14. The one who conquers is promised a λευκήν stone in Revelation 2:17.

Further, the reference to the *white* robes of the saints has particular relevance in the book of Revelation. The people of the church of Sardis, who had not soiled their garments

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<sup>83</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 499.

are told they will walk with Christ in λευκοῖς in Revelation 3:4. The one who conquers is told he will be clothed in λευκοῖς garments in Revelation 3:5. The church of Laodicea is counseled to buy from Christ λευκὰ garments to cloth their nakedness in Revelation 3:18. The twenty-four elders (possibly representing the glorified Church) is seen in Heaven clothed in λευκοῖς garments with golden crowns on their heads in Revelation 4:4. The Tribulation Martyrs are given λευκή robes and told to rest a little longer in Revelation 6:11. The great multitude of worshippers from every tribe tongue and nation standing before the throne are clothed in λευκάς robes in Revelation 7:9. One of the twenty-four elders asks about the identity of the ones wearing the λευκὰς robes in Revelation 7:13.<sup>84</sup> He is told in the next verse that they were the ones coming out of the Great Tribulation having washed their robes making them ἐλεύκαναν in the blood of the Lamb. The Bride of Christ is clothed in fine linen λαμπρὸν and pure in Revelation 19:8 and only six verses later the armies of Heaven are seen riding λευκοῖς horses wearing λευκὸν robes following the Lord on a λευκός horse in Revelation 19:14.

### *Evaluation*

If the significance of λευκὸν in Revelation 19:14 is in its difference from λαμπρὸν in Revelation 19:8 than this thesis is wrong. It is the studied opinion of this author however that this idea would seem to put unbearable weight upon the word λαμπρὸν in Revelation 19:8 and would consequently ignore the exhaustive references to the λευκὸν robes of the saints from the beginning to the end of Revelation. Further, it seems that to ignore the wealth

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<sup>84</sup> If the 24 elders represent the glorified Church this interchange makes sense for the Church might not immediately recognize God's fresh work of grace upon the people of the world through the ministry of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists and the reconstituted Israel.



of references to the saints as the ones wearing white robes and to disassociate them from the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 would require exceedingly compelling evidence. The fact that this topic is rather ignored in most commentaries mitigates against that possibility.

### **καθαρόν**

The last accusative ending the sentence is καθαρόν. It is part of the participial clause describing the clothes of the armies of Heaven. It, like βύσσινον and λευκόν before it, is an adjective in the accusative case, the singular person, and the neuter gender, and like λευκόν should be thought of as a predicative adjective.<sup>85</sup> Thayer tells us that, both Homer and the Septuagint mostly use the term to denote something that is “clean, pure, free from the admixture or adhesion of anything that soils, adulterates, corrupts.”<sup>86</sup> When Jesus tells the Pharisees to clean the inside of the cup so the outside would be καθαρόν, in Matthew 23:26, purity is in view. When Joseph wrapped the body of Jesus in a καθαρῶ linen shroud in Matthew 27:59, the unspoiled nature of the shroud is in view. Hebrews 10:22, tells us to draw near to God with a clear conscience, a clean heart, and clean bodies washed with καθαρῶ water, to speak of the untainted quality of the water by which we are to wash.

The uses in Revelation are all similar. In Revelation 15:6 the angels are said to be wearing bright linen that was καθαρὸν with golden sashes across their chests. The fine

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<sup>85</sup> Albert L. Lukaszewski, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary* (Lexham Press, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Formatted and hypertexted by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.7)

linen of the saints is said to be bright and καθαρόν in Revelation 19:8 and the armies of Heaven are described the same way in Revelation 19:14. Heavenly Jerusalem is said to be made of καθαρόν gold like clear glass in Revelation 21:18, and the streets are described the same way in Revelation 21:21. The TDNT remarks that καθαρόν carries with it the idea, “of physical, religious (ritual and cultic) and moral purity” and that “it is an important concept which accompanies religious thought through its various stages.”<sup>87</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the full impact of this term but the TDNT implies that the Old Testament usage was focused more on physical purity while the New Testament focuses on inward purity, except for the book of Revelation where the description of the angels and saints are likened to the New Jerusalem in their physical purity.<sup>88</sup> In light of this observation, the fact that the raiment of the Church is said to be “the righteous deeds of the saints,” in the later half of Revelation 19:8 becomes immediately relevant. It would seem that the inside of the cup is now matching the outside of the cup for the Church (Matt. 23:26).

### *Evaluation*

The idea that the garments of the armies of Heaven are described in the larger context of a description of Christ (Rev. 19:13-16) combined with the fact that their purity is remarked upon in this context is of no small significance. The basic idea is readily apparent to even shallow observation: the Bride of Christ is seen in Revelation 19:8 with new garments for a reason and this reason makes Revelation 19:14 and the armies of Heaven relevant. Having

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<sup>87</sup> Friedrich Hauck and Rudolf Meyer, “Καθαρός, Καθαρίζω, Καθαίρω, Καθαρότης, Ἀκάθαρτος, Ἀκαθαρσία, Καθαρισμός, Ἐκκαθαίρω, Περικάθαρμα,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 414.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 424.

been cleansed on the inside by the new birth, the Church is seen to be thus cleansed on the outside in their raiment. This powerful picture carries into Revelation 19:14 where the armies of Heaven are described as acting along with Christ, wearing the outfits denoting their worthiness to do so. The idea that Revelation 19:14 breaks from the powerful imagery of 19:8 to insert a description of angels does violence to the basic tenor of the text.

### *Concluding Analysis*

The exegetical weight of Revelation 19:14 seems to be settled in the overt contextual themes of Revelation. From the white robes promised to the saints, to the picture of the Bride of Christ being given these very robes, to the description of an army from Heaven riding behind Christ, the context is clear. The saints are in view the whole time.

The immediate proximity of Revelation 19:8 to 19:14 combined with the descriptive context of Revelation 19:13-16 makes it apparent that the raiment of the armies is what causes Revelation 19:14 to be significant. The perfect participle in 19:14, used to emphasize the completed act of being clothed in the past, points immediately back to 19:8. The almost identical phrase βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν to describe the clothing of the Church in Revelation 19:8 and the expression βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν to describe the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 is impossible to dismiss.

The Old Testament description of the nation of Israel and of temple priests as *armies* gives obvious precedent to see the reference to armies in Revelation 19:14 as more than merely a host of angels. This combined with the general focus on the glorified Bride a mere

six verses earlier overcomes the automatic designation that these armies must be angels.

Further, in light of the exegetical observations in this chapter it seems that to assign these armies as anything other than the Church would require some evidence beyond mere assertion. In light of these basic considerations it is the conclusion of this author that to view the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 as synonymous with the glorified resurrected Church in Revelation 19:8 is an exegetically sound choice.

## Chapter 4

### *Theological Implications*

Exegesis is to drive theology, not the other way around. This concept seems uniquely difficult to employ in the book of Revelation for a variety of reasons. Chief among them is the many streams of theological commitments that usually precede the very first lines of the book. The two main presuppositions being some sort of replacement theology or some sort of dispensational theology. Replacement theology is duly noted to be most apparent in how the nation of Israel as the people of God is replaced, or subsumed, by the Church in the New Testament. Dispensational theology, on the other hand, sees the nation of Israel as distinct from the Church, where the two groups represent two different dispensations of God's redemptive plan.

What is most divergent about the two views is the nation of Israel. *The Holman New Testament Commentary*, gives a helpful summary of this conflict in its description of dispensationalism, remarking that the "most distinguishable part of that framework has to do with the nation of Israel."<sup>89</sup> It goes on to summarize:

In short, dispensationalists have long taught (as popularized by the *Scofield Bible* and works such as the systematic theology of L. S. Chafer, and taught by such institutions as Dallas Theological Seminary, Moody Bible Institute, Talbot Theological Seminary, and Grace Theological Seminary) that God has two distinct plans running on parallel tracks: one plan for the nation of Israel and one plan for the Church. Israel's plan is an earthly plan, centered around the messianic kingdom which will be established on earth, while the Church's plan is a heavenly plan, focused on citizenship in heaven. Dispensationalists do not believe that the Church has replaced Israel in God's plan, that all the promises and prophecies made to Israel still stand today and will be fulfilled as originally given. Nondispensationalists believe (in general) that the

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<sup>89</sup> Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, vol. 6, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 354–355.

Church is spiritual Israel, and that Israel's mission in God's plan has been replaced by his mission through the Church. While the dispensational view on Israel has continuity and cohesiveness on its side (notwithstanding the aforementioned "moderating" approaches offered in recent years), it is accused of hermeneutical literalness not warranted by Scripture. Nondispensationalists are accused of spiritualizing the portions of Scripture dealing with Israel and ignoring the modern developments in the nation which would seem to indicate a literal fulfillment of prophecies regarding the nation.<sup>90</sup>

This description is helpful in pointing out the very broad theological issue dividing interpreters in Revelation. Those that reject the dispensational framework see it as "fanciful and unfounded."<sup>91</sup> They instead often interpret Revelation as either having been fulfilled already in AD 70, or fulfilled spiritually by the Church throughout history.

It seems obvious that if one presupposes that the Church is exclusively in view throughout John's Revelation, that the armies of Heaven in Revelation 19:14 must *by necessity* be angels. If one presupposes a distinction between the Church and the nation of Israel, that these two distinct groups are in view throughout John's Revelation, then the armies of Heaven could very well be the Church. Regardless, it is obvious that theological commitment will tend to naturally drive the exegesis of this passage.

Having said all this, commentators on both sides agree that exegesis is the thing driving their conclusions. This creates a common ground for communication between these two camps. It is the contention of this author that if the earnest interpreter comes to Revelation 19:14 willing to follow the exegetical evidence, they will find themselves having moved into the dispensational camp.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Brian Neil Peterson, "Ezekiel, Book of," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

There are a few reasons for this but one of the main ones has to do with chronology. Since Revelation 19 comes before the final battle of Armageddon and subsequently before the resurrection of chapter 20, the idea that there is an army of glorified saints riding behind the Lord implies more than one general resurrection, as posited by the replacement camp. This coincides with the dispensational futurist view that sees the rapture of the Church as preceding the events of the Great Tribulation. Ryrie, presents the view succinctly in his *Survey of Bible Doctrine*:

Contrary to popular ideas, there will not be one general resurrection day. Basically there are two resurrections when considered in relation to classes of people involved, not chronology—the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust (Jn 5:28–29; Lk 14:14). Between the death of the body and the resurrection, both the righteous and wicked exist in a conscious state. The believer is in the presence of the Lord during this time (2 Co 5:1–8; Phil 1:23) while the unbeliever is in conscious torment (Lk 16:19–31).<sup>92</sup>

He goes on to describe the several stages of resurrection in Scripture:

The resurrection of the just is also called the first resurrection and will occur in several stages, not all at once. The dead in Christ will be raised first at the rapture of the Church (1 Th 4:16). The redeemed of the tribulation period who die during that time will be raised before the millennium (Rev 20:4). The redeemed of Old Testament times will also be a part of the resurrection of the just. Expositors are divided over when they will be raised, some believing that it will happen at the rapture when the Church saints are raised, and others holding that it will occur at the second coming (Dan 12:2—the writer prefers the latter view). As indicated above in discussing the judgment of the great white throne, all unsaved people of all time will be raised after the millennium to be judged and then cast into the lake of fire forever (Rev 20:11–15). At their resurrection they will apparently be given some sort of bodies that will be able to live forever and feel the effects of the torments of the lake of fire.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Notice that he sees the pre tribulation rapture of the Church as the first stage of resurrection. This coincides with a glorified Church being glorified, clothed in white, and identified with Christ in Heaven as the tribulation of earth is underway. This is exactly what Revelation 19 seems to be describing. The Resurrected, glorified Body of Christ, having already been resurrected, is given her raiment and subsequently identified with Christ before He rides into Armageddon.

Debating either of these interpretive grids can seem overwhelming for the average student of Scripture. However, the studious exegete can cut through all the drama and let the text speak for itself. Being that Revelation 19:14 is not hotly debated in commentaries, regardless of theological persuasion, seems to suggest that this paper may provide an obvious way forward in accepting the dispensationalist viewpoint as the better choice.



## Chapter 5

### *Practical Application*

Revelation begins by expressing that it is written to be a blessing to the reader (Rev. 1:3). It ends reminding the reader that the blessing of Revelation is for churches now (Rev. 22:16). After John sees the glorified Christ, he is given a vision of this same Christ auditing the churches of the day (Rev. 2-3), and then he is invited to come up to the throne room of God where 24 elders, possibly representing the glorified coronated Church, are seen casting their crowns down in worship (Rev. 4). During the rest of the book, while the inhabitants of the earth go through the Great Tribulation, the Church is seen in worship as God begins to keep His promise to the nation of Israel and as they are seen coming to faith in their King and begin to fulfill their mission to evangelize the earth (Rev. 5, 7, 11). Then in Revelation 19, as Heaven is opened up Christ is seen clothing His Bride in white, pure robes (Rev. 19:7-9). As Christ then rides down to earth from Heaven on a white horse He is followed by an army of followers on white horses wearing the very garments described in 19:8 (Rev. 19:14).

If the thesis of this paper is true, then when Jesus comes to stand on the Mount of Olives at the end of the age, His Church will be standing there with Him. Zechariah captures this scene from Israel's perspective:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half

southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, **and all the holy ones with him** (Zechariah 14:1–5).

If the thesis of this paper is indeed correct, those who call themselves the Church, the Body of Christ, the Building of Christ, and the Bride of Christ, are the Holy ones Zechariah was talking about. To look forward to the future day when the feet of the saints will stand with Christ on the Mount of Olives to save a people for a millennial promise is one thing. To look forward to this future with confidence is quite another.

## Appendix

<sup>AGNT</sup> **Revelation 19:14** Καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐφ' ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν.

<sup>BYZ</sup> **Revelation 19:14** Καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐπὶ ἵπποις λευκοῖς, ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν.

<sup>NAS</sup> **Revelation 19:14** And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses.

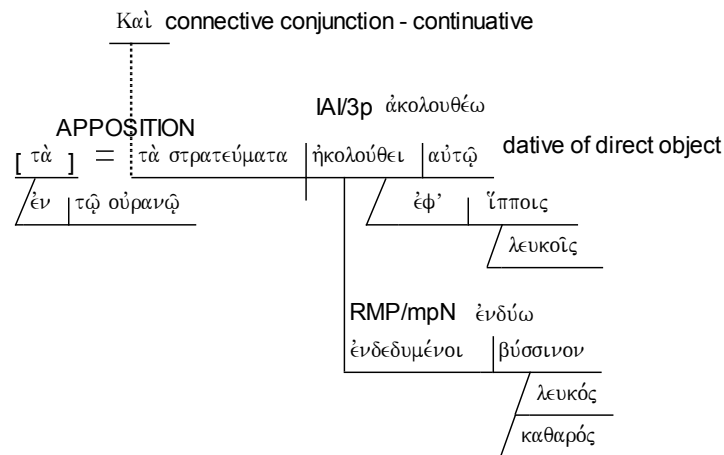
<sup>NKJ</sup> **Revelation 19:14** And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 19:14** And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Revelation 19:14** The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Revelation 19:14** And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

<sup>NLT</sup> **Revelation 19:14** The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses.



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