

The supper of the Great God

by Douglas E. Cox

In Revelation 19 John describes a supper, to which all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven are invited. Verse 9 of the chapter says that those who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb are blessed. This would imply that the birds are the ones who are blessed. Commentators have struggled with the imagery of birds devouring the flesh of men at the supper, and so they argue that two different suppers are depicted in Revelation 19.

Dispensationalist H. A. Ironside interpreted Revelation 19:6-21 as “two suppers.” [1] The birds who are invited are interpreted as vultures.

Revelation 19:17-21

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God;

That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

Gregory K. Beale said the sword causes a literal slaughter of God's enemies, and argued against an interpretation which views the prophecy as depicting the conversion and redemption of men. He wrote: [2]

Some have viewed Rev. 19:11-21 as a depiction of Christ converting the nations throughout the course of history, with a secondary emphasis on figurative judgment. But this is incompatible with the consistent emphasis on judgment throughout the section (argued above) and the climactic nature of the judgment described as occurring at the end of world history . . . For example, to say that the "killing" of the Antichrist's followers "by the sword proceeding from his [Christ's] mouth (19:21) refers to their conversion is to reverse the meaning of 19:11-19, of the punitive OT allusions therein, and especially of the Ps. 2:9 and Isa. 11:4 pictures, both in their original contexts and, above all, in their prior use in Rev. 1:16 and 2:12, 14 (cf. also Isa. 49:2).

A. C. Gaebelain viewed the "supper" as a feast for literal birds. He wrote: [3]

Verses 17-21. And what a sublime vision comes next! An angel is beheld by the Seer standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he summons the birds that fly in mid-heaven to gather themselves to the great supper of God to eat the flesh of the slain. The birds of prey are summoned in anticipation of the battle of Armageddon which is then imminent. And now the hour of judgment has come. An angel, standing in the sun, the place of supreme authority, gives the invitation to the birds of prey to be ready for the feast which a holy and righteous God will have for them. The day of wrath has come. The slain of the Lord shall be many (Isaiah 66:16).

Charles D. Alexander criticized a literal interpretation, which claimed these birds are vultures. [4]

The fantasies woven around this 'battle' by theorists both inside and outside the evangelical testimony, have recently been brought to the last degree of absurdity by a pamphlet emanating we believe from Canada, telling us that there has recently appeared in the valley of Megiddo in Palestine "a new breed of vultures, a breed never seen before, multiplying at three times the normal rate," in supposed fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy that ravenous birds of prey will assemble to devour the carcasses of the slain in the great battle. The pamphleteer informs us that these birds are buzzards, and the buzzard (he says) usually lays only one egg at a time, whereas these apocalyptic buzzards are laying four, so there will be enough birds to take care of the vast number of corpses slain in the great battle.

On account of this phenomenal rate of increase of the buzzard or vulture population, the writer naturally forecasts that the great battle must soon take place. He should be warned. Maybe it has already begun!

How trivial are these wild guesses compared with the solemn and sober meaning of prophecy. Had the writer of this pamphlet only looked into the preceding chapter he would have found feathered fowl enough to expose the folly of his guesses. He would have read these words in chapter 18 verse 2: "Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every

unclean and hateful bird". There the unclean birds are synonymous with devils and evil spirits.

Yet another figurative use of birds denoting something very much more sinister than feathered fowl is found in our Lord's parable of the sower (Matthew 13) where we read of the 'wayside' hearers who received not the word which was preached, and so the fowls came and devoured the seed. These fowls, the Lord explains as follows, "When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart". By what principle therefore does our Canadian friend conclude that the birds of Revelation 19 are vultures? He also overlooks the plain statement of the verse that not one variety of predatory birds assembles for the feast on the battlefield, but "all the fowls which fly in the midst of heaven."

In several prophecies, birds are symbolic of spirits; the examples cited by Alexander are malevolent, but there are also benevolent ones. The spirit of God that John the Baptist saw coming down upon Jesus was like a dove. [John 1:32-33]

An angel standing in the sun

The sun represents the gospel, and in Revelation 12:1, the woman who represents the church is clothed with the sun. The angel in the sun has to do with the gospel, the good news that all nations will be blessed.

Fowls that fly in the midst of heaven

Perhaps the fowl flying in the midst of heaven represent the saints who are raised up to immortality at the coming of Christ.

David longed for wings like a dove, so he could fly away to his "rest." [Psalm 55:6] He remarked on the presence of birds within the temple, and in the altars there. [Psalm 84:1-3]

Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 60:8

Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?

In several scriptures, birds seem to represent the saints. Jesus told his disciples to be "harmless as doves." [Matthew 10:16] He said they were more valuable than many sparrows. [Matthew 10:31] He described the kingdom of God as a great tree, in which the fowls of the air would dwell. [Luke 13:18-19] He used the figure of eagles gathered together around a carcass, to represent the church. [Luke 17:33-37]

The supper of the Great God

The supper of the great God is clearly the royal wedding between Christ and the saints. Those invited to it are blessed.

Revelation 19:9

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

John incorporated the prophecy of Ezekiel, about the judgment of the hordes of Gog and Magog, which involves a great sacrifice, and a feast for the birds and beasts, in his prophecy.

Ezekiel 39:17-22

And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood.

Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan.

And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you.

Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord GOD.

And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them.

So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward.

Animals and men, even horses and chariots, are on the menu. But, men and horses are unclean, and so are unfit for sacrifices. Drinking of blood was forbidden. [Acts 15:29] Horses represent people who lack understanding. [Psalm 32:9] And chariots, of course, are inedible.

A literal interpretation of this scene is thwarted, because the sacrifice occurs after the burial of the remains of the army of Gog and Magog for seven months.

That ye may eat the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, horses

The invitation to eat flesh alludes to the cleansing of men, in the judgment. The metaphor is somewhat similar to the idea underlying Peter's vision when the first Gentiles were brought into the church.

Acts 10:9-16

Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

In Peter's vision the various creatures represented Gentiles, who had been made clean.

In John's prophecy the kings, captains, mighty men, and horses also represent people who have been cleansed by God. Just as Peter was invited to eat, the fowl that fly in the midst of heaven represent the saints, who like Peter, are invited to eat at a great supper.

Obviously Peter did not literally eat any of the creatures offered to him. He understood that the creatures in the vision were symbolic of Gentile converts, who Christ had cleansed, and who were then accepted into the fellowship of the church as brethren.

This suggests how John's prophecy may be interpreted. The invitation to the birds to feast upon the flesh of men does not mean that men are to be literally eaten. In John's prophecy, as well as Ezekiel's, Peter's vision has been turned around; instead of the saints being invited to eat creatures of all kinds, the saints are represented by birds, who are then invited to eat the flesh of men. As in Peter's vision of the great sheet, the meaning is that men of all kinds are to be included in the church, as they will be cleansed by God. The expression "... all the fowls were filled with their flesh" implies they are included in the church, which is "the mother of us all." [Galatians 4:26] The heavenly Jerusalem will become the spiritual mother of men. [Revelation 21:24-25]

And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth

The sword refers to the scriptures. To be *slain* by the word of God is a metaphor; the old nature is slain, and men become new creations.

This figurative sword of holy scripture is used in warfare against the false teachings, and flawed interpretations.

A hidden Psalm

In Revelation 7:4-8, John listed the names of the 12 tribes of Israel in an order unlike that used elsewhere in the Bible. The meanings of the names provided in Genesis, and the order in which the names are listed by John suggests a Psalm, which applies to the church. It confirms the interpretation of the supper of Revelation 19:17 suggested above.

Judah: I will praise the LORD
Reuben: Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction
Gad: He has granted me good fortune
Asher: Happy am I
Naphtali: With great wrestlings have I wrestled
Manasseh: God will make me forget all my toil
Simeon: The LORD hath heard me
Levi: He has joined Himself to me
Issachar: He has purchased me
Zebulun: He will dwell with me always
Joseph: The LORD shall add more children to me
Benjamin: By the son of His right hand.

References

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4. Charles D. Alexander, *Revelation Spiritually Understood Part 23; Total Victory Of Christ, Revelation 19*.
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