

Description of the Army

Revelation 9:16 -19

The End Times

In my last post, we began to explore **Revelation 9:13-15** dealing with the **Sixth Shofar**. In this post, we will continue to explore **Revelation 9:16-19** on the **Description of the Army**.

"... and the number of cavalry soldiers was two hundred million! — I heard the number. Here is how the horses looked in the vision: the riders had breastplates that were fire-red, iris-blue and sulfur-yellow; the horses' heads were like lions' heads; and from their mouths issued fire, smoke and sulfur. It was these three plagues that killed a third of mankind — the fire, smoke and sulfur issuing from the horses' mouths. For the power of the horses was in their mouths — and also in their tails, for their tails were like snakes with heads, and with them they could cause injury." ~ Revelation 9:16-19 (CJB)

Oliver Greene writes: ¹

And what a description! The riders of the horses had breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone. The riders undoubtedly will be super-human, and probably demented... a great army of demons out of hell. The heads of the horses were as the heads of lions (the lion is king of the beasts). The riders are mounted upon horses that cannot be stopped, cannot be conquered. Out of the mouths of the horses issue, fire, smoke and brimstone! Verse 18 further describes them by saying, "by these three" (fire, smoke and brimstone) one-third of all men shall be killed. The army of locusts did not kill men—they only tormented them. But this army leaves one-third of earth's population dead.

As I mentioned in my last post, a possible explanation of the identity of this massive army could be a military force, such as China. That giant nation can easily put together an army of two hundred million soldiers. They also can move across the continent to the middle-east.

The number of these **cavalry soldiers** is truly astounding. It is not a human estimate but, a divinely-communicated count. While beyond our understanding, is the divine count of an invading force from the east.

We have confronted again the same interpretative problem faced with these horses as arose with the locusts ~ the relationship between what is symbolic and what is literal. The symbols must be interpreted within the context of scripture and within their cultural background. To read modern weaponry into the expressions is to tread on the shifting sand of technology which changes from age to age. The main emphasis in the vision is manifestly the horses. The horse in scripture is ever the symbol of natural strength (Job 39:19) and natural speed (Psalm 33:17). This strength and speed need a controlling hand (Psalm 32:9) if it is to be usefully employed. It is not surprising that when men rebel against God, they should use the horse in military action against their fellows. In Scripture, the horse is almost always linked with warfare. (The one exception to this rule is found in Isaiah 28:28.)

Here is how the horses looked in the vision: the riders had breastplates that were fire-red, iris-blue and sulfur-yellow; the horses' heads were like lions' heads; and from their mouths issued fire, smoke and sulfur. That the horses are symbolic is clear from the description given. Even cross-breeding and genetic engineering will hardly produce a horse with the head of a fire-breathing lion. Based on the most recent data, the entire horse population of earth is 58 million; it would require a huge population explosion amongst horses to produce two hundred million! Any idea that warfare in the future will revert to cavalry charges is simply imagination. The symbol depicts the natural strength of nations harnessed militarily to put on the battlefield the mightiest invasion earth has ever seen.

The symbolic nature of the horses is clear by the fact that **Yochanan** sees their heads **like lions' heads**. This symbol allies the strength of the horse with the sovereignty of the lion, the king of beasts. The teeth of the lion

¹ A Layman's Commentary on Revelation by Don Jones.

(Revelation 9:8) spoke of ferocity; here the head indicates a claim to the majesty that would defy the **King of kings**. This army is Satan's great attempt to deny to **Yeshua** the sovereignty of earth. The mouth speaks of the ravenous appetite of the Lion (Daniel 6:21; 1 Kefa 5:8), and it is fitting that these symbolic lions should spew forth **fire and smoke and sulfur**. "**Adonai caused sulfur and fire to rain down upon S'dom and 'Amora from Adonai out of the sky**" Genesis 19:24 (CJB). The symbol describes the offensive weaponry that wreaks havoc amongst men. It is futile to attempt to identify these with different kinds of weapons whether conventional artillery or tactical nuclear weapons. What God rained on Sodom and Gomorrah in righteous judgment Satan copies in his forces. The carnage on earth is unimaginable.

It was these three plagues that killed a third of mankind — the fire, smoke and sulfur issuing from the horses' mouths. For the power of the horses was in their mouths — and also in their tails, for their tails were like snakes with heads, and with them they could cause injury. The repetition of the death-toll from this satanically inspired invasion from across the Euphrates river re-emphasizes the awful carnage that results. The mention again of the fire and smoke and sulfur lays new stress on the death-dealing weaponry that is used by this invading army. That the massacre occurs by the **mouths** of these lion-headed horses gives added significance to the fact that the invasion wreaks immediate destruction as soon as it strikes. The colossal numbers of this mighty army and the character of their terrible weapons bring appalling death and destruction. Under the fifth trumpet men sought death and could not find it; now they have trouble escaping from it.

As **Yochanan** had no point of reference in describing modern war weapons, he used the first-century knowledge he had. A full-scale nuclear war could easily account for one-third of the world's population being killed. Whatever one's interpretation at this point, the results are the same. The death toll staggers the imagination.

Special Comparative Note on Chapter 9:16-19 ²

Historicist Approach:

According to **Historicists**, the term **two hundred million** can be translated as "*two myriad myriads*" which can refer to an indefinite number. (This is supported by Strong's Greek Dictionary.) That interpretation supports their position that this refers to the Turks who used myriads to number their troops. The Turks also had breastplates for their horses similar to that described in this passage. They also credit the Turks with artillery that could produce **fire, smoke and sulfur**.

Preterist Approach:

Preterists don't believe the **two hundred million** is a literal number. (Remember, that they believe that this incident refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. It's doubtful that Rome could muster 200 hundred million soldiers.)

Futurist Approach:

Among **Futurists**, there are two main camps concerning the identification of these bizarre **cavalry soldiers**. First, they are demonic spirits. Secondly, they are a literal army described in figurative language probably from the Orient. The **three plagues that killed a third of mankind** can certainly be linked to modern warfare technology. Lindsey, of course, compares it to thermonuclear war.

² Material in this section is taken from "*Revelation: Four Views, Revised & Updated*" by Steve Gregg. The notations in parenthesis are my comments.

Idealist Approach:

Some **Idealists** believe that the **Fifth** and **Sixth Shofars** are related in that the former describes the internal corruption of a wicked culture and the latter tells of external forces that bring down such a decayed society. A commonly held position contrasts the locust invasion of the previous woe with this onslaught of horses. The former unleashed spiritual armies of demons against the wicked; the latter brought physical, human armies as a punishment and warning upon rebellious humankind. The number **two hundred million** should not be understood literally.

In my next post, we will continue to unpack **Revelation 9**. We will unpack **Revelation 9:20-21** on the issue of **No Repentance**.