

## **MISTAKES 26, 27, 28 AND 29**

### **THERE ARE FOUR COMMON MISTAKES MADE WHEN REVELATION CHAPTER 9, THE TWO HUNDRED MILLION MAN ARMY, IS EQUATED WITH REVELATION 16, ARMAGEDDON**

There are four common mistakes that are often made with respect to the two hundred million man army recorded in Revelation 9:16 with the description of the campaign of Armageddon found in Revelation 16.

Simply put, the two hundred million man army is not a human army, thus the military campaign of Armageddon is not describing the same event as Revelation 9. Hence, the “kings from the east” in Revelation 16 cannot be equated with the two hundred million man army. Add to this, the “east” in John’s day, was never a reference to the “Far East,” namely such countries as China and Japan.

We can clear up these popular misconceptions as we examine the following evidence:

#### **THE BACKGROUND**

With the introduction of the sixth trumpet of God’s judgment upon the world, John heard a voice that sounded from the altar, the place of worship in heaven:

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind (Revelation 9:13-15 NIV).

An unidentified voice commands this sixth angel to release four destructive angels who have been bound at the Euphrates River. The release of these four angels will cause unimaginable devastation, a third of the human race is to be killed!

#### **THE TWO HUNDRED MILLION MAN ARMY**

We then read of a huge army of soldiers on horseback:

The number of soldiers on horseback was two hundred million; I heard their number (Revelation 9:16 NET).

Two hundred million soldiers arrive on horseback!

#### **THERE ARE A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS THAT ARISE ABOUT THESE RIDERS**

This particular verse immediately brings five questions to mind.

The first question is: Should we assume that this a literal number? Is this an actual army of two hundred million?

The second question revolves around the identity of these riders on the horses: Are they humans or non-human?

The third question, and the most important, is this: Are the riders on the horses in Revelation 9 involved in the same military campaign that we later read about in Revelation 16?

The fourth question, should we equate the two hundred million man army with the “kings from the east.”

The last question concerns what the “east” referred to in John’s day.

### **IS TWO HUNDRED MILLION A LITERAL NUMBER?**

The first question that arises concerns whether we should view this two hundred million as a literal number. How are we to understand it?

The Baylor Handbook to the Greek New Testament explains it as follows:

...the entire expression would then indicate “several units of twenty-thousand multiplied by 10,000” (Revelation, Baylor Handbook to the Greek New Testament)

Greek scholar Buist Fanning further explains:

The census of the troops (v. 16a) is a staggering number, “twice ten thousand times ten thousand.” This, ... seems to be a way of expressing an unimaginably large body of military forces. A literal count (whether exact or rounded) is not intended but rather the sense that such an army would wreak unspeakable levels of destruction. The fact that such a number is astounding explains John’s narrative aside, “I heard their number,” as an affirmation that this was not merely his own estimate but part of the heavenly vision (Buist Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary, 2020).

Fanning also comments:

This is why the translation “two hundred million” (CSB, NASB, NET, NLT, NRSV) may seem too precise, though it too is an astonishing size for an army (Fanning, note 60).

What we can confidently say is that this expression indicates an extremely large number!

### **QUESTION 2: ARE THE RIDERS HUMAN BEINGS OR DEMONIC PERSONAGES**

The next issue concerns the identity of the riders on the horses: Are they human or not? Is this incalculable number of riders on horses to be viewed as an actual human army or a demonic army?

### **THE CASE FOR THE RIDERS BEING HUMAN**

The following arguments are usually given by those who believe that a human army is in view in this passage in Revelation 9.

#### **ARGUMENT 1 THIS IS THE SAME GROUP DESCRIBED IN REVELATION 16: THE KINGS FROM THE EAST**

Often, those who believe that this an extraordinarily large human army listed in Revelation 9 link this passage to the participants in the battle of Armageddon as recorded in Revelation 16, the kings from the east.

Therefore, it is claimed that both passages are speaking of the campaign of Armageddon. Indeed, it is contended that it does not seem possible that two huge armies will gather together, at two different times during the final days of the “time of the end.” To the point, these two passages must be speaking about the same military conflict and the same participants.

Since it is clear that Armageddon definitely involves human armies, we should also assume human armies in this passage.

**ARGUMENT 2 THE EUPHRATES RIVERS IS EMPHASIZED IN EACH BATTLE**

Another clue which seemingly links these two passages and makes the case for a human army is the Euphrates River. The river is mentioned in Revelation 9 as well as in Revelation 16.

Therefore, we should not assume that two separate military campaigns take place at the time of the end with the Euphrates River highlighted in each one. Consequently, they must be the same battle which is fought by humans. Again, this is particularly true since Revelation 16 definitely involves human armies.

**ARGUMENT 3 THE POSSIBILITY OF A TWO HUNDRED MILLION MAN ARMY**

When John wrote the Book of Revelation, it has been estimated that the population of the world was somewhere around two hundred million. In other words, there was no possible way that an army of that size could be mustered to fight a battle.

However, today, it is possible. Indeed, it has been estimated that China alone could field an army of two hundred million. When put together with Japan, we find that there would be more than enough soldiers to come from the East to fight this battle.

**ARGUMENT 4 THE LORD USES HUMAN ARMIES AS HIS INSTRUMENTS**

Those who believe that this is a human army cite the numerous times in Scripture when God uses other similar pagan armies as instruments of His punishing of others, or punishment of the armies themselves. Therefore, it is not out of the question that a human army is in view in Revelation 9.

**ARGUMENT 5 THE WEAPONS MENTIONED ARE A FIRST CENTURY DESCRIPTION OF MODERN WEAPONS**

It is sometimes contended that the weapons described in verses 9:17-19 are John's best attempt to describe modern warfare, given the limitations of his vocabulary in the first century.

In sum, these are the basic arguments used for those who contend that Revelation 9 is a literal battle with human beings who number approximately, or exactly, two hundred million. That great number is made up of the "kings from the East" seeing that it is possible to field such an army today from nations from the Far East.

**RESPONSE TO THE IDEA OF A HUMAN ARMY OF TWO HUNDRED MILLION**

While many argue that the army in Revelation 9 is made up of humans on horses, and that it should be linked to Armageddon in Revelation 16, there are a number of reasons as to why this is not so. They include the following:

**REASON 1 THE CONTEXT MAKES IT CLEAR THAT DEMONS ARE IN VIEW**

In verses 2-10 of Revelation 9, we are introduced to demonic forces in the form of locusts. In other words, we previously have another description of a non-human army in this same context. For example, they are described as follows:

The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. They had what looked like gold crowns on their heads, and their faces looked like human faces (Revelation 9:7 NLT).

## Four Common Mistakes Made In Equating Revelation 9 with Revelation 16

In addition, this two hundred-million-man army on horseback, in 9:16-19, has a number of things in common with the locust army previously mentioned. We find that both groups have breastplates, their tails inflict pain, and they have features like lions.

If the two groups are not identical, they are certainly closely related. Therefore, since the first group is obviously non-human, it naturally follows that this second group is likewise non-human.

### **REASON 2 THE PEOPLE WHO ARE KILLED ARE DIFFERENT IN EACH CONTEXT**

In Revelation 9, the armies kill 1/3 of humanity. However, in Revelation 16, the carnage is limited to the invading forces who attack Israel.

### **REASON 3 THE NUMBER TWO HUNDRED MILLION IS NOT REALLY PLAUSIBLE**

An army of two hundred million men would not merely consist of two hundred million people. All armies need supply lines. When we start calculating what it would take to sustain such an army it seems to be an impossible undertaking. In other words, to mobilize such a force, as well as to supply it, does not appear to be realistic.

### **REASON 4 THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD HAS BEEN DEPLETED**

Let us not forget that one fourth of the population of the world has previously been killed due to the judgment of the fourth seal:

And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:8 ESV).

Furthermore, the believers in Jesus Christ were previously removed from the world at the time of the rapture of the church. Their numbers also need to be subtracted from the inhabitants of the earth at this time.

### **REASON 5 DEATH IS INFLICTED BY THE HORSES NOT THE RIDERS**

Another indication of the symbolic nature of this account is that death is inflicted upon the people by the horses, rather than the riders of the horses. In fact, the power to kill is in the mouth of the horses as well as their tails:

For the power of the horses resides in their mouths and in their tails, because their tails are like snakes, having heads that inflict injuries (Revelation 9:19 NET).

### **REASON 6 THE KINGS FROM THE EAST DOES NOT REFER TO CHINA**

One of the main arguments for seeing the two hundred million man army as human and not demonic in Revelation 9 is because they are equated with the military campaign in Revelation 16, specifically the kings from the East.

### **WHERE WAS THE EAST IN JOHN'S DAY?**

When Scripture speaks of "kings from the east" it was not referring to what we call the Far East, China and Japan:

## Four Common Mistakes Made In Equating Revelation 9 with Revelation 16

In the first-century land of Israel as well as the wider Roman Empire, the “east” meant Mesopotamia and Persia or Parthia (e.g., Isa 41:2, 25; 46:11...), often in connection with fears of invasion and conquest from empires to the east.

Every informed reader in the Roman Empire, especially in places like Asia Minor and Syria-Palestine near the Parthian border, would understand the “kings of the East” as the Parthians; the river Euphrates was the boundary between the Roman and Parthian empires. (Craig Keener)

Parthia was located in what is modern day Iran. Its territory included, among other countries, modern day Iraq and Turkey.

Furthermore, we should not assume that these armies come only from the east. Indeed, in the same context we read:

For they are the spirits of the demons performing signs who go out to the kings of the earth to bring them together for the battle that will take place on the great day of God, the All-Powerful (Revelation 16:14 NET).

Notice that it says that “all kings of the earth” are brought together for this battle.

Give evidence such as this, Buist Fanning warns about making uniformed comments about the Far East:

It is unfortunate to read popular interpreters who look to the Far East and confidently speak of “Oriental rulers” and forces from countries such as “communist China” or Japan, the “Land of the Rising Sun.” In previous centuries interpreters confidently cited Ottoman Turks and other Muslims invading Eastern Europe as the eastern powers. To declare that these specific modern nations are the “fulfillment” of what John speaks of has invariably been an embarrassment to prophetic interpretation in subsequent generations (Buist Fanning, Revelation, Zondervan).

He brings up an excellent point. In the past, there were confident assertions by well-meaning Bible commentators that Turkey’s Ottoman empire was in view here, they were the “kings from the east.” However, today, there is no longer an Ottoman empire.

Therefore, we do NOT want to be an embarrassment by making a similar mistakes in our identification of these kings coming from the east as has been done in the past.

### **SUMMARY**

We can summarize our conclusions as follows:

1. No doubt, the number, often translated two hundred million men, refers to an enormous army. However, to translate the Greek text as two hundred million is perhaps being overly precise.
2. There are Bible believers who make the case for this large army on horseback in Revelation 9 as literal humans.
3. However, the totality of the evidence is that the army in Revelation 9 is demonic. Indeed, the context makes it clear.
4. We cannot equate the military campaign in Revelation 16 with what is recorded in Revelation 9. There are major differences between the two.

## Four Common Mistakes Made In Equating Revelation 9 with Revelation 16

5. In the first century, the phrase, “the kings from the east” referred to the territory of such modern nations as Iraq and Iran. It did not refer to nations of the Far East, such as China and Japan.
6. Too many mistakes have been made by commentators in the past as well, as in the present, attempting to pin down the exact nations referred to as the “kings from the east.” In fact, for a long time, it was assumed that these kings were the Turkish Ottoman empire, an empire that does not exist today!
7. Finally, the “kings from the east” are not the only nations involved in the campaign of Armageddon. Indeed, it is the nations of the world that gather together.
8. Revelation 16 does not mention the number of participants in the campaign of Armageddon.