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The Battle of Armageddon

Review

In chapter 14, Satan is described as a rabid dog who is out to destroy God's people. But Satan is on a leash. Michael is described as a powerful angel who restrains Satan, limiting the extent of evil he can instigate against God's people.

According to the books of Daniel and Revelation, when Michael is removed from restraining Satan, this powerful fallen angel will be cast down to the earth. Knowing that his time is short, Satan will direct his demonic wrath against God's people. The Antichrist will be revealed, and the Great Tribulation will begin. The Great Tribulation will demonstrate what the fallen human race would have become under Satan's rule if God had not intervened with his plan of redemption.

Much of Revelation is devoted to describing God's anger toward this unprecedented evil against his people. There will be all kinds of plagues and other examples of God's wrath, culminating in his wrath at the battle of Armageddon.

The Battle of Armageddon

During this climactic battle, Christ will demonstrate the full measure of his anger against unbelievers for their worship of the Antichrist and their horrible persecution of the saints. In Revelation 19, Christ is

depicted as coming out of heaven riding on a white horse to destroy the Antichrist and his army and put an end to the Great Tribulation:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! . . . in righteousness he judges and makes war. . . . From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. (Rev 19:11–15)

This battle takes place between Christ in the celestial realm of heaven and a real army on the plane of this earth. Christ just says the word and the armies on the earth that are gathered against him are destroyed. He also sends the Antichrist and the false prophet directly to the lake of fire, bypassing the Great White Throne judgment altogether. Satan is then bound, and the millennial reign of Christ begins.

Premillennialists believe that the appearance of Christ on his white horse represents Christ's second coming. But as was demonstrated in chapter 6, "A Critique of Premillennialism," Christ is never depicted as leaving the celestial realm of heaven on his white horse and descending to this earth to engage the Antichrist and his armies. He remains in heaven when the Antichrist is destroyed and Satan is bound by an angel. He then rules the world during the millennium from his throne in heaven.

This battle is reminiscent of an event in the Old Testament when the prophet Elisha is with his servant. An earthly army with horses and chariots surrounded their city, and Elisha's servant became concerned:

"Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, *the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire* all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15–17)

While there was a real army on earth threatening Israel, there was also a real army of God's powerful angels in the celestial realm of heaven. When the army advanced against Israel, Elisha prayed and God struck the soldiers with blindness.

Later in 2 Kings 19, we learn that when Hezekiah was king of Judah, and Jerusalem was surrounded by an Assyrian army, a single angel of

the Lord struck down 185,000 soldiers in one night. Jesus referred to this angelic power when he was being arrested and Peter wanted to use his sword to prevent the arrest: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53).

Twelve legions of angels is more than 72,000. If a single angel of the Lord could strike down 185,000 Assyrians, then that is enough angelic power to kill more than 13 billion soldiers! Jesus claimed to have enormous angelic power at his immediate disposal in the celestial realm. Jesus, like Elisha, knew what powers existed around him in the celestial realm of heaven.

Yet Jesus chose not to have angels intervene at that time, and he suffered greatly during his trial and crucifixion. At the battle of Armageddon, however, the ascended Christ will indeed intervene. The spirits of the departed saints will be involved in this celestial battle as well, for they are described as “the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, . . . *following him* on white horses” (Rev. 19:14).

In Hebrews, the departed saints are described as a cloud of witnesses in heaven. During this battle, the departed saints go from being mere spectators to being participants. There is no evidence, however, that they fight in this battle. Satan’s army is swiftly destroyed when Christ merely says the word. The spirits of the saints following Christ are then depicted as continuing their descent and reinhabiting the earth through the first resurrection. They will dwell on the earth once again through a resurrection of their natural bodies.

Although the spoken word of Christ destroys the large armies gathered at Armageddon, many civilians not engaged in this battle will survive and enter the millennium. Many of these survivors will surely become believers when they witness the reign of Christ and the earth being restored to its Edenic condition. But not all of them will be converted.

Gog and Magog

Proof that some unbelievers will remain in the world during the millennium is that at the end of that period, when Satan is released one final time, he leads them into one last rebellion against God. Satan’s power of deception is remarkable, for the world will have just

experienced a thousand years of an earthly paradise under the reign of Christ. Yet for one last time, Satan exposes fallen mankind's susceptibility to deception and greed. John taught that these armies of Satan come from Gog and Magog. They surround Jerusalem, but they are destroyed before they can do any harm to God's people:

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them. (Rev. 20:7–9)

Some theologians believe the reference to Gog and Magog after the millennium is actually a recapitulation of the battle of Armageddon that occurs *before* the millennium. John, however, clearly described these events surrounding Gog and Magog as occurring *after* the millennium:

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog. (Rev. 20:7–8)

Revelation contains a great deal of recapitulation and connecting many of these various texts can be difficult. But chapters 19, 20, and 21 proceed in a very clear linear progression.

A more detailed description of the battle involving Gog and Magog can be found in Ezekiel. In chapter 37, Ezekiel first tells of the dry bones of Israel coming to life as the departed Jewish saints inherit the messianic kingdom. During the restoration, wars will not take place because Christ will be ruling the world. Villages and cities will have no need for walls to defend themselves against hostile invasions. After many years of peace and prosperity, Israel will have accumulated great wealth from gifts from other nations in gratitude for the joy and blessings brought about by the reign of the Jewish Messiah. Ezekiel then describes the people of Gog and Magog inspired by Satan seeking to

plunder this wealth by attacking a land of “unwalled” villages that have recovered from war:

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, . . . After many days you will be mustered [“when the thousand years are ended”]. In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war [during the restoration], . . . You will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your hordes, and many peoples with you [a huge army]. On that day, thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme and say, ‘I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates,’ to seize spoil and carry off plunder.” (Ezek. 38:1–12)

But with Christ continuing his reign over this world from his throne in heaven, they will not succeed:

I will enter into judgment with him [Gog], and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur. (Ezek. 38:22)

John also revealed that they will be destroyed by fire, but he further informed us of Satan’s demise:

But fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev. 20:9–10)

After Gog and Magog are destroyed by fire and Satan is permanently sent to hell, the earth remains in its restored state, with Christ still reigning from heaven. After these events, however, all the prophecies that must occur on this earth before Christ comes again have been fulfilled. The fig tree will be ripe, and Christ’s second coming in the clouds on Judgment Day could happen at any moment: “So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates” (Matt. 24:33).

Summary

During the Tribulation, when Satan is given unrestrained control over unbelievers, the world will experience an age of unparalleled demonic humanity. This will demonstrate what this world would be like if God had not intervened with a plan of redemption. This terrible period of human history comes to an end at the climactic battle of Armageddon.

Like Old Testament prophets, John had a vision of the celestial realm in which he saw heaven opened and Christ riding on a white horse. From the celestial realm, Christ merely says the word and the Antichrist and his false prophet are destroyed. Satan is then bound by an angel sent from heaven, and the millennial reign of Christ begins.

There is one final revolt by sinful man inspired by Satan, but Christ's reign is everlasting because this revolt does not succeed. Christ's kingdom then transitions to the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven or the new heavens and new earth.