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Revelation Text 10: Chapter 19:11-21

Three more units to go; this will be a tough one.

Prologue	In the Spirit	In the Spirit				In the Spirit		In the Spirit	Epilogue
	Letter <u>1</u>	Seals <u>2</u>	Trumpets <u>3</u>	Signs <u>4</u>	Bowls <u>5</u>	Babylon <u>6</u>	Judgment <u>6</u>	Jerusalem	
Setting									
Scene 1									
Scene 2									
Scene 3									
Scene 4									
Scene 5									
Scene 6									
Church Interlude									
Scene 7									

Where are we in the book? Well, if we combine this section with the one on Babylon, it is column number six. This makes it the counterpart to scene number six in each column. And therefore here, too, we are dealing with judgement, the final battle, and together with scene/column 7, the end – that is, the conquest of evil, setting things right, and re-establishing God’s rule over creation.

Prologue	In the Spirit	In the Spirit					In the Spirit		Epilogue
	Letters	Seals	Trumpets	Signs	Bowls	Babylon	Judgment	Jerusalem	
Setting								19:11-16	
Scene 1								1	
Scene 2								2	
Scene 3								3	
Scene 4								4	
Scene 5								5	
Scene 6								6	
Church Interlude									
Scene 7								7	

The section consists of seven scenes introduced with “and I saw”, plus an introduction as in the other sections – except that here, the introduction does not show us something in the heavenly temple. The introduction is 19:11-16, and it shows us a white horse and its rider, who is, of course, Jesus.



It is often assumed that these verses announce the second coming. However, if they are indeed the introduction to the following series of seven scenes, this is unlikely. In this case, we would expect it to show us something that is true in the unseen realm, something for the entire present age between the first and the second coming of Jesus, not just the end.

I posit that the battle or war (the Greek word used can be translated either way) is not something that happens at the very end; it is a war that rages throughout the period we are in. Or to put it slightly differently, the end began with Jesus and therefore the final battle began with him as well, taking its course throughout the entire present age.

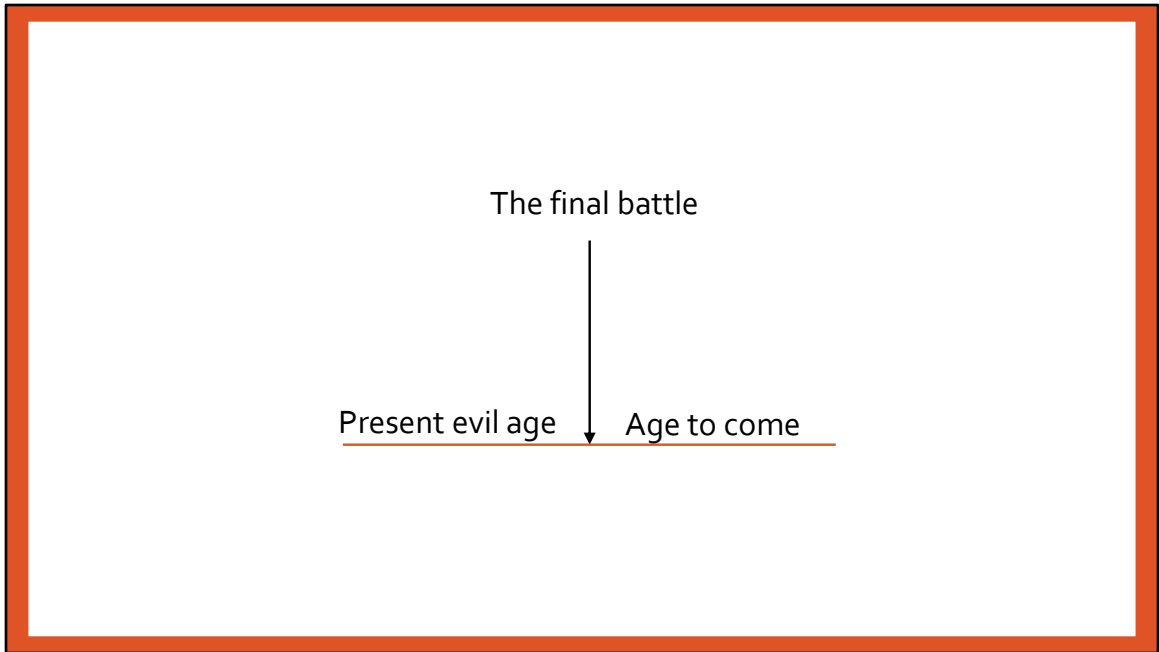
I will come back to these introductory verses later to explain some of their details, but first I will discuss the final battle motif in more depth.

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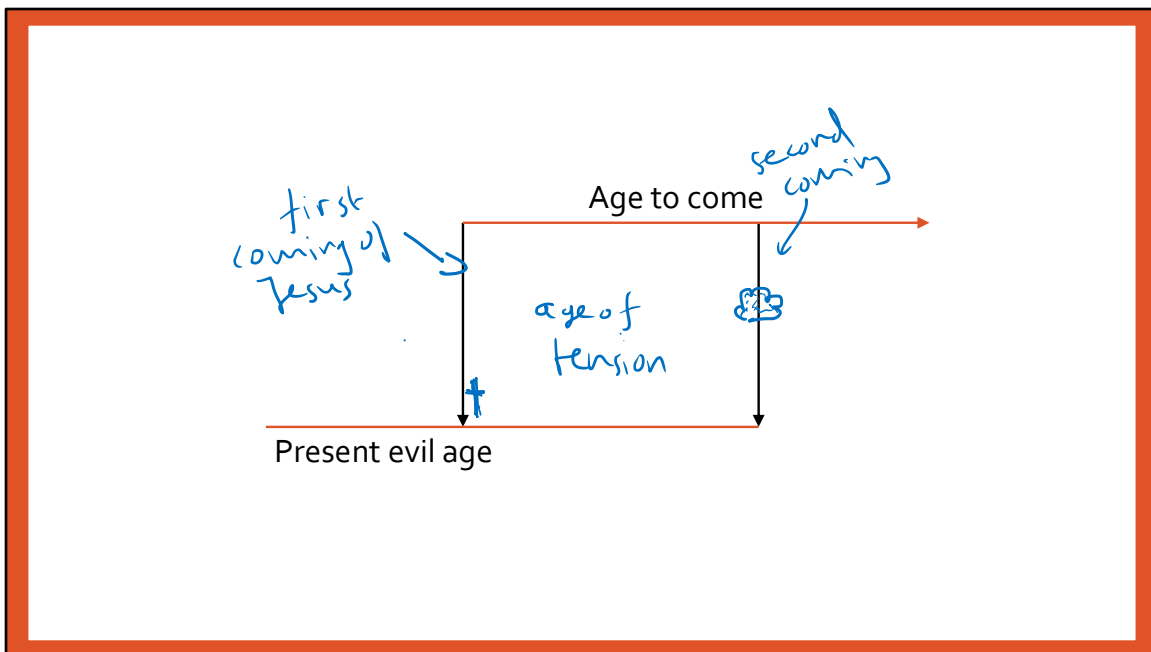


The motif of a final battle or war is a familiar one in the Old Testament prophets. The battle would put an end to the present world order and replace it with God's rule from Zion. It usually takes the form of many nations attacking the people of Israel. The most elaborate description is found in Ezekiel 38 and 39: the attack by Gog of Magog. This prophecy is clearly taken up by John, even if in a radically redefined form. When John reuses Ezekiel 38 and 39, the battle is no longer against Israel, but against Christ and his people. And the personal name Gog for a leader of the land of Magog has become a code, "Gog and Magog" – a code for the nations of the world, in as far as they resist God until the bitter end.

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The prophets, then, expected some sort of culmination of the perennial conflict between Israel as God's people and the pagan nations at the end. God's intervention would put an end to the attack and to the present evil age and establish his rule on earth as part of inaugurating a new age and a new (or renewed) creation.



But then came Jesus and with him, the future began. The kingdom of heaven was indeed inaugurated. The promise that had been entirely future now became both – in some ways – still future and at the same time – in some other ways – a present reality.

This has repercussions for the idea of a “final” battle. For one, the opponent in the battle is redefined in the New Testament: the real enemy is not the pagan nations, but the forces of evil behind those nations. For another, like the kingdom, the battle is not limited to the end but happens within history as well, because history since Christ *is* the end, and it is a battle, between two ages and two kingdoms. The present age is the in-between age, an age of conflict, battle, and tension.

In fact, already in the OT, we find hints that this battle or conflict was not merely and entirely a future and final event. Let’s take a look at Psalm 2:

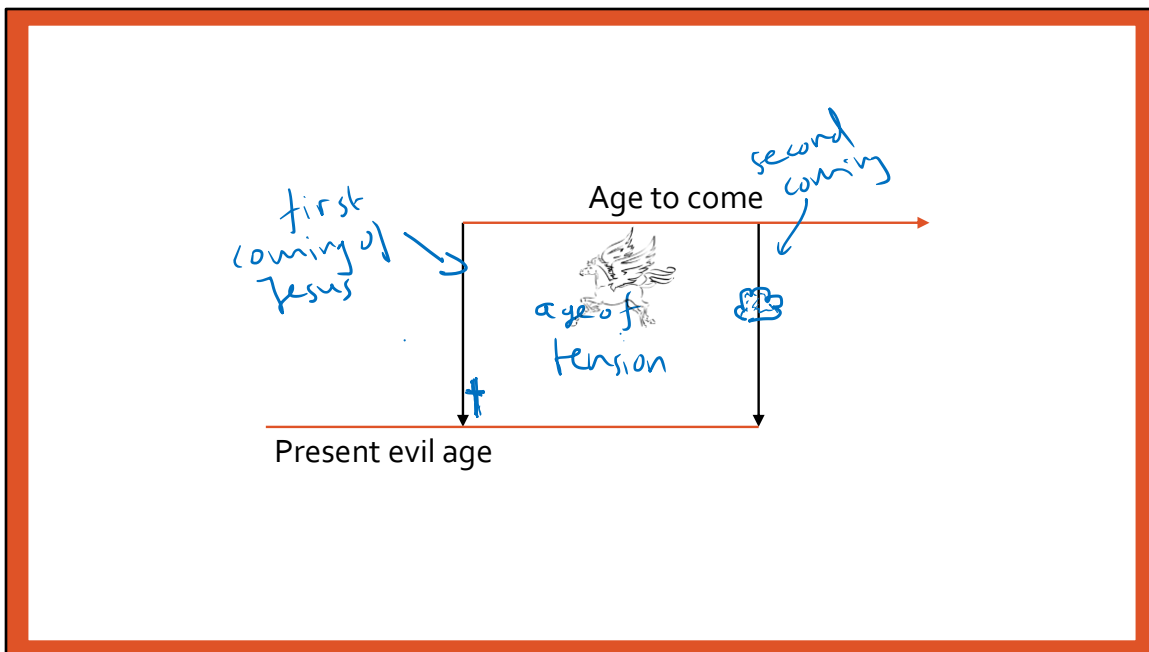
Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and against his  
Anointed, saying,  
"Let us burst their bonds apart  
and cast away their cords from us."  
...  
"As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill." (Ps. 2:1-3, 6 ESV)

Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
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...  
"As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill." (Ps. 2:1-3, 6 ESV)

This is a messianic Psalm, finding its fulfilment in Christ, but only because it has its roots in David's experience as the OT prototype of the NT Messiah. Israel's battles



were more than instances of national warfare; they had deep spiritual significance because they were part of the enduring conflict between the forces of evil and the creator.



This OT view of the nations gathering together to make war on Israel inspired the battle scenes in the book of Revelation: Armageddon. But it is no longer a literal, military type of battle.

Already in the book of Acts, this is the case. In Acts, Psalm 2 inspires the prayers of the church after some of the apostles have been arrested and released. In their prayers, they quote Psalm 2 as the words of David:

'Why did the Gentiles rage,  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his  
Anointed'—

for truly in this city there were  
gathered together against your holy  
servant Jesus, whom you anointed,  
both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along  
with the Gentiles and the peoples of  
Israel, to do whatever your hand and  
your plan had predestined to take  
place. (Acts 4:25-28 ESV)

'Why did the Gentiles rage,  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant  
Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the  
Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan  
had predestined to take place. (Acts 4:25-28 ESV)

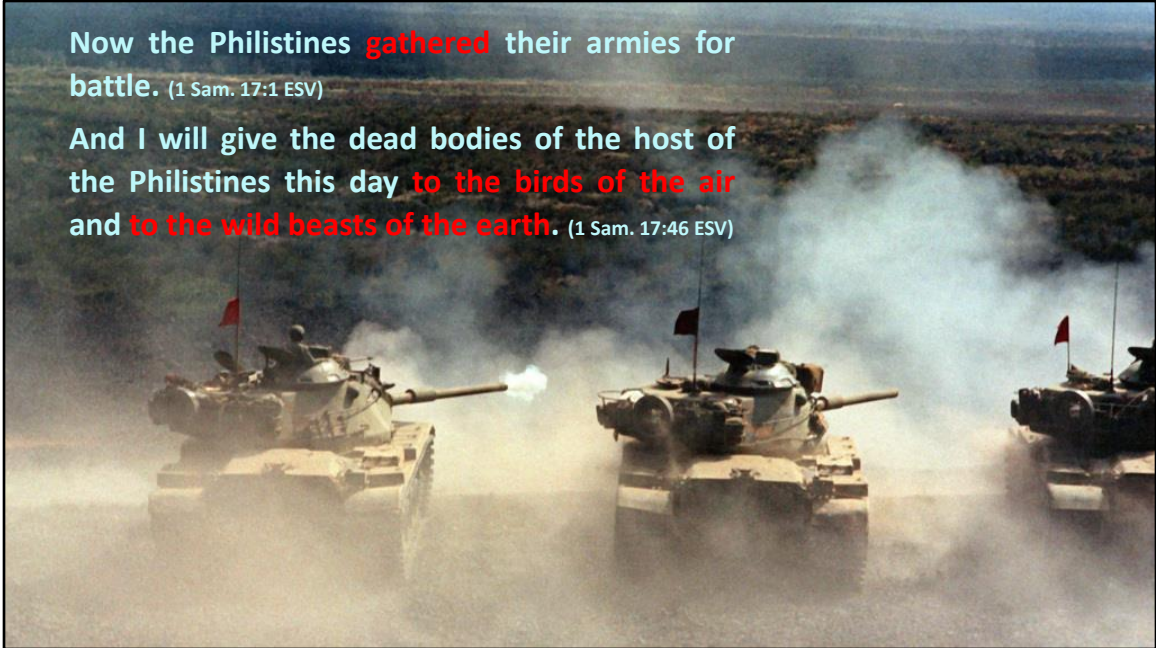


# ARMAGEDDON

Nations gathered to make war against Christ – this sounds like a small Armageddon. It certainly fulfils Psalm 2, showing that the “final” battle does not only happen at the end – but it does so in an unexpected way. It shows the war has taken on a new form: it is no longer an ordinary war in which one army battles another.

Now the Philistines **gathered** their armies for battle. (1 Sam. 17:1 ESV)

And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day **to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth.** (1 Sam. 17:46 ESV)



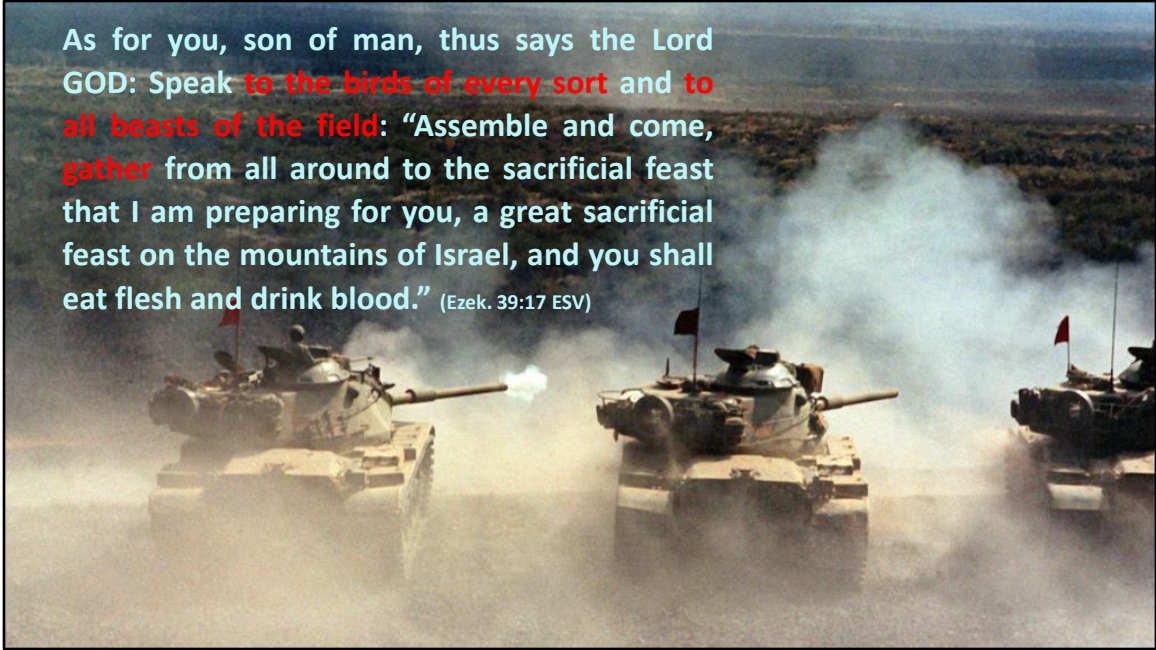
Revelation uses battle language borrowed from other OT passages as well. These quotes here are from the chapter in which David battles Goliath:

1 Sam. 17:1, “Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle” (ESV). Notice the verb *gather*, also used in Revelation.

Verse 46: “And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth” (1 Sam. 17:46 ESV). This became a standard phrase in describing and announcing battle scenes.

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As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Speak **to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field:** “Assemble and come, **gather** from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood.” (Ezek. 39:17 ESV)



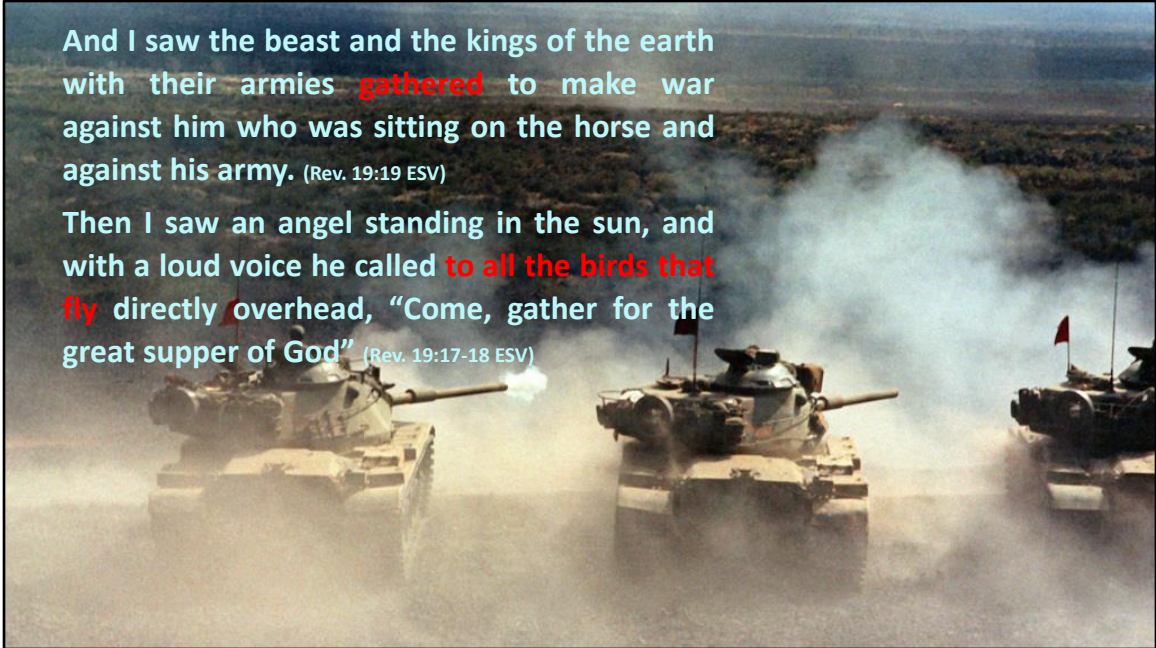
Ezekiel used similar language in his prophecy of a final attack:

Ezek. 39:17, “As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field: ‘Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood’” (ESV).

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And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies **gathered** to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. (Rev. 19:19 ESV)

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called **to all the birds that fly** directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God" (Rev. 19:17-18 ESV)



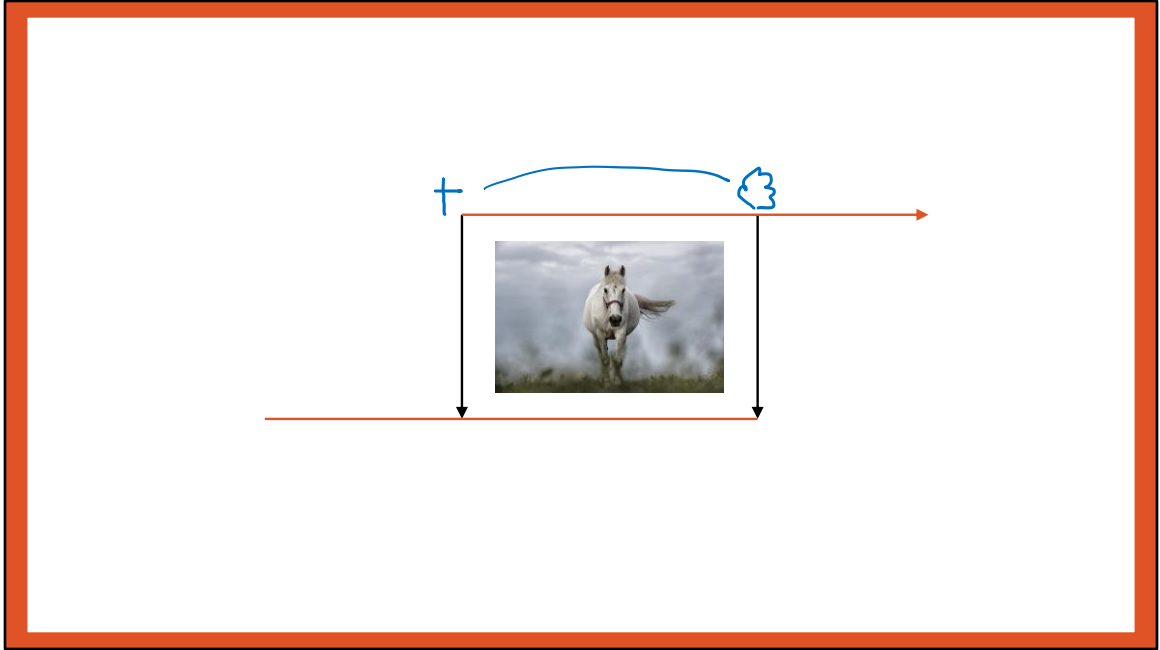
And John uses this language as well:

Rev. 19:19, "And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army" (ESV). "Gathered!"

Rev. 19:17-18, "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "'Come, gather for the great supper of God'" (ESV). A great feast for the birds of heaven.

So John uses the language of the OT but with a new, different, and redefined meaning. The language is far from literal; the army of the one on the white horse, for instance, is quite different from what we would normally understand an army to be. Don't be fooled by the photograph here of tanks shooting into the distance. The battle looks nothing like this!

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Earlier, I argued that the beast is the Roman Empire and its emperor, at least in its initial manifestation. But if this is so, then the war or battle referred to in 13:7 (the beast against the saints) and 17:14 (the beast against the lamb) was already in full swing in the first century. Indeed, we witness the beginning of the war in Revelation 12:7; it is not an event that is limited to the future.

This confirms what was stated earlier: Revelation 19:11-16 does not show us the second coming, but the reality of Christ's present involvement in the conflict of the ages.





So, “the battle” coincides with history. But aren’t there two battles at the end of the book of Revelation, and not just one, with the millennium in the middle? Well, no.

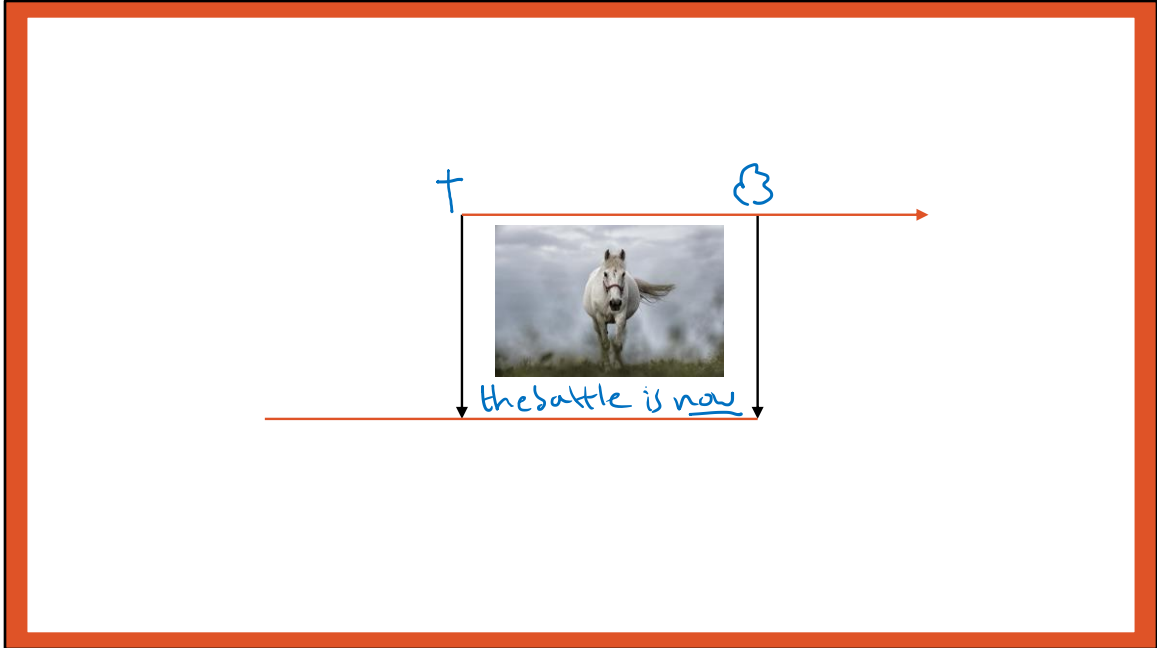
Military Artist drawing of the Battle of Delville Wood, The Somme. July 1916,  
[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Delville\\_Wood\\_Battle\\_July\\_1916.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Delville_Wood_Battle_July_1916.jpg), Public Domain



There is only one battle in Ezekiel 38-39, and both Revelation 19:17-21 and Revelation 20:7-10 borrow heavily from Ezekiel. And in Greek, both passages refer to “the battle” – the definite article is used, meaning one specific battle is in view. Most likely, therefore, John wants us to understand both passages as describing one and the same battle, namely the one Ezekiel wrote about, but now reinterpreted in the light of Christ’s coming.

In the next unit, I will take up the question of the millennium and Revelation 20. But for now, and in short, there are at least two ways to resolve this difficulty. One, Revelation 20 is a flashback; it takes us back to the past, much like chapter 12 did (and therefore precedes the battle of chapter 19; remember that Rev. is not chronological). Two, there may be a pattern or cycle of battle (against various manifestations of the beast) and millennial victory in which Satan is repeatedly and increasingly overcome. More about this in the next unit.

Military Artist drawing of the Battle of Delville Wood, The Somme. July 1916,  
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In conclusion, it makes sense to say that the battle is now.

The war between light and darkness that we know from the Old Testament, although essentially decided through the death and resurrection of Christ, has intensified in some respects at the same time (so Rev. 12 and 13).

This conflict, “the battle,” can be seen more readily in some phases and in some places than in others. The early church certainly felt the full brunt of it. So do Christians in a number of places today.

We can, therefore, think about the “final battle” in these terms:



## Global Spiritual Perennial

It is global. The conflict has broadened geographically, from Israel to a worldwide conflict.

It is spiritual. It has become more obvious that it is a spiritual, not a military, conflict; ultimately, the opponent is Satan.

It is perennial or ongoing. It marks the entire age between the birth of Christ and his return in glory, sometimes more, sometimes less.



Okay... Now back to the introductory passage that shows us Jesus as the divine warrior. That the horse he rides on is white symbolises victory.

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## FAITHFUL AND TRUE

The one on the horse is faithful and true. This is what matters. Faithful and true wins the war.

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**FAITHFUL AND TRUE  
THE WORD OF GOD  
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**

There is a name paradox here. Although his name is called three times (Faithful and True; the Word of God; and finally, King of kings and Lord of lords), we are also told...

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## A NAME THAT NO ONE KNOWS

...that he has a name that no one knows but himself.

You may wonder what the point is of having a name that no one knows.

It signifies that no one has power over him. No one is able to manipulate him.

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He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood

(Rev. 19:13 ESV)

Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his  
who treads in the winepress?

Their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and  
stained all my apparel.

(Is. 63:2-3 ESV)

Jesus is clothed in a robe dipped in blood (Rev. 19:13 ESV). The description mirrors that of God as a divine warrior in the book of Isaiah, where God returns from battle, his garments drenched with blood.

In Isaiah, God is asked, “Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?” And his answer is:

“Their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.” (Is. 63:2-3 ESV)

The two descriptions have much in common. However, there is a profound difference. The robe of Jesus is not *spattered* with blood but *dipped* in blood. And it is not *after* but *before* the battle. This makes it likely that the blood is his own, not that of his enemies. This is still the lamb of God. He rides into battle to save his human opponents, if they will let him.



He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood ...

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to  
strike down the nations ...

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath  
of God the Almighty.

(Rev. 19:13-15 ESV)

That the blood is probably his own is confirmed when we recognize the weapon the rider wields. It is a sword coming from his mouth, symbolising the word of God. This is all it takes.

As in chapter 12, it is the blood of the lamb and the word of testimony, faithful and true, that overcomes the enemy.

To put this in plain language: Evil in the world is conquered through self-sacrificial love and truth, not hatred or violence or even legitimate force.

Two more things are worth noticing in this passage. First, in verse 15, we are told that “He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.” Future tense. Interestingly, in chapter 14:20 this event has already been described.



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

Second, he is not alone. In verse 14 (ESV) we are told: “And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.”

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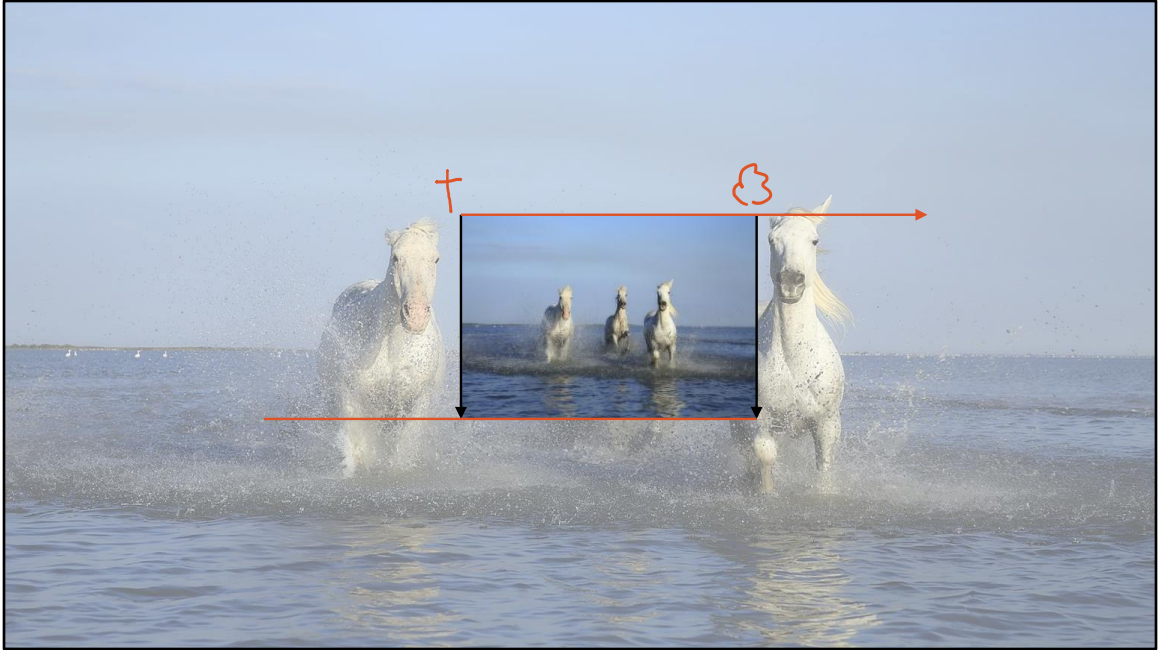


And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. (Rev. 19:14 ESV)

It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Rev. 19:8 ESV).

Don't be too quick and interpret this as an army of angels. In 19:8 (ESV), it was said of the bride: “It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints”. So who makes up this army, dressed in fine linen, that is, dressed with righteous deeds? It is the people of God. It includes you and me.

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Together with Jesus and throughout the present age, the church rides out into battle as the army of heaven, conquering and overcoming through self-sacrificial love and the truth of his word.

*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, 2016 (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society)*

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Revelation Text 10: Chapter 19:11-21

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