

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Lesson 7 | Armageddon

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” Revelation 19:11

Many ancient people believed that history was cyclical. They thought of history as an endless loop where things got better, then worse, then better again. There was no final winner. This cycle would simply continue on and on forever. The Bible is different, though, because the Bible sees history as linear, not cyclical. In other words, the Bible sees all of history as headed somewhere. While things may get better, then worse, then better again for a time, eventually all of history is headed for a climactic showdown between pure righteousness and pure evil. When we see great tragedy, whether it be moral disaster – like war, crime, or cruelty – or whether it be natural disaster – like floods, earthquakes, or fires – evil will one day be eradicated.

Why do you think that God allows there to be times when evil seems to us too strong to overcome?

As we turn to the last few pages of our Bible, we find a description of the battle that will end evil. Revelation 19-22 describes how history will end, with not one but two climactic battles that lead to a new heaven and a new earth in which there is nothing defiling that remains. This passage has come to be strongly debated in Christian circles. Differing eschatological positions understand the passage differently. We will take a dispensational premillennial view, but while it is true that the eschatological view that you take is important, all views and all Christians agree that Jesus is coming back to destroy evil once and for all.

Jesus Will Defeat Evil Going into the Millennium (Revelation 19)

The first phase in Jesus’ eradication of evil comes at the end of the tribulation, right before the end of all time. This passage begins by painting a picture of the strong and conquering King before describing His impressive conquest. This passage should give use confidence that the King we follow is worth following and inspire greater worship in our hearts.

The Description of Jesus (19:11-16)

As this section begins, it describes the physical presence of Jesus as He rides down to fight the rebellious nations of the world which are being led by Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet.

How does the passage describe Jesus’s appearance?

Here we read that He is sitting on a white horse, His eyes are a flame of fire, He is wearing many crowns, His clothing is dipped in blood, and from His mouth goes a sword.

How does this description present Jesus? How might this be different from ways we are used to thinking about Jesus?

We should also pay close attention to the names Jesus is given in this section.

What names do we find for Jesus in these verses?

Jesus is called “Faithful and True” (19:11), the “The Word of God” (19:13), and the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (19:16).

Not only do we see a description of what Jesus looks like, and titles that help us understand who He is, but we also see what He does in these verses.

How are Jesus’s actions described in these verses? How do we reconcile this with the mercy of God?

Jesus leads the armies of heaven (19:14); He smites the nations and rules them with a rod of iron (19:15); and He brings God’s fierce wrath on those who deserve such punishment (19:15).

Too often the picture of Jesus people have is of a permissive parent always saying, “You probably shouldn’t do that. Please don’t do that. Oh well, what can I do?” Jesus will deal with evil, and He will be swift and severe when He does. Jesus came the first time as a lamb to offer Himself as a sacrifice. He is coming the second time as a lion, and those who ignore Him will realize too late their grave mistake.

The Devastation of Jesus (19:17-21)

The battle of Armageddon is described using strong language. An angel calls out to the birds that feed on carcasses to get ready to gorge themselves on the bodies of all on the earth. Much like the final judgment at the Great White Throne, this carnage will include both great kings as well as the small, seemingly unimportant people. The leaders of this rebellion, the beast (antichrist) and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire and are never heard from again. Then Jesus destroys the rest of the rebellious humanity with the sword that comes from his mouth, and the carnivorous birds eat the bodies of the dead until they are full.

What does the violence of this passage teach us about the character of God and the nature of evil? How might this be different from the way most people today think?

Jesus Will Eradicate Evil at the End of the Millennium (Revelation 20)

After Armageddon, the Bible describes a thousand-year period of peace and prosperity on the earth where Jesus and His saints’ rule over the earth. This period begins with Satan being locked up, but it ends with him being released so that he can once lead humanity in rebellion against God. Yet this battle is also doomed to fail, and he will be finally defeated once and for all at the battle at the end of time.

Satan Locked Up (20:1-3)

At the outset of the millennial kingdom Satan is locked in the bottomless pit, preventing him from deceiving the nations. Some view the “millennium” as a way of talking about the church age as a whole, and so they will argue that Satan is “bound” now in that he can’t stop the gospel from going forward.

Can you think of any problems with this view? Are there any passages in the NT that would contradict such a view?

The activity of Satan during this era is clearly stated throughout the NT, and the record of human experience makes it pretty clear that Satan is having his way throughout much of history. Yet there is coming a day when Satan will be truly bound and unable to influence people away from God.

Satan Released (20:7-8)

Some have wondered why it is God would do things the way that He has in these chapters. They argue that the book of Revelation is cyclical, and that Satan’s release and defeat is just another way of talking about Armageddon as described in Revelation 19. Such a view argues that Revelation 19-22 is a smattering of somewhat related visions, but that there isn’t a chronological sequence. Yet even a casual reading of Revelation 19-22 gives a pretty clear progression – Armageddon, millennium, second battle, Great White Throne, eternal state.

But why would God not simply get rid of Satan? Why allow him to go back and deceive the nations once again?¹ The easy answer is, “Well, that’s the way God wanted it!” And that’s true. But God’s decision is not random or arbitrary. The final rebellion at the end of all time points to God’s goodness and highlights man’s selfish wickedness. Man rebels because man is a rebel. Satan got man to rebel against God in paradise once, and he will do it again.

How do you think it is that Satan is able to get the nations living in the kingdom to rebel against Jesus their King? What does this show us about our own hearts?

Satan Finally Defeated (20:9-10)

At the end of the millennium, Satan will lead humanity in one last attempt to overthrow God’s rule, and he will be defeated. At last, the great enemy who has done so much harm will be forever removed. He will spend the rest of eternity in the lake of fire and will face eternal justice for the horrific crimes he committed.

Why does God not simply destroy Satan now? Why would God wait as long as He has?

¹ Another question that is frequently asked is where the rebels come from if they are all wiped out in Revelation 19 at the end of Armageddon. The best solution seems to be that those who are faithful to God at the end of the tribulation will enter the kingdom as mortals and will continue having children. In a world where the curse has been reversed, it isn’t hard to see how the whole earth could be repopulated sufficiently in one thousand years with people who must decide for themselves whether they will follow Jesus or live for themselves.

Jesus Will Prevent Evil from Going into the Eternal State (Revelation 21-22)

Once evil is gone, it will be gone forever. This includes both natural evil (things that happen that are bad) and moral evil (things that people do that are bad). The description of how things will be forever at the eternal state makes clear that nothing that could harm is allowed in the new heaven and the new earth.

Natural Evil Is No More (21:4-5)

The last few chapters of Revelation describe what the final state of the redeemed will look like. This includes several descriptions that hint that the pain and sorrow we see today will no longer be there. For example, we read that every tear will be wiped away (21:4), that there will no longer be death or sorrow (21:4) and that God is making all things new (21:5). Natural disasters, the sorrow of aging, death and decay will have no place in the new heaven and the new earth.

How is natural evil connected to moral evil? Why does God allow things to fall apart now the way He does?

What will it be like to live in a world where there is no more disaster?

Moral Evil Is No More (21:8; 22:15)

But Revelation is also clear that the new earth is what it is because sin will not be there. God's pure and righteous holiness will prevent anything to be in this recreated earth that is impure or defiling. The new earth will be what it is because God is there, and because God is there evil cannot be.

Read through the lists in 21:8 and 22:15 and discuss why these particular items are chosen, and why it is that they are set apart as representative of all evil.

God has called us to fight as soldiers in a battle, a battle that will last our entire lives and has been going on since the serpent first slithered up to Eve. As we fight, we must arm ourselves with the spiritual armor of Ephesians 6, we must know the enemy we face, and we must keep our eyes fixed on our all-powerful general who commands the armies of heaven. But the good news is that the decisive battle has already been won. We wait for the end, not to see what will happen but because we know what will happen. This gives us the confidence we need to live for God today, knowing that the day is coming when all evil will be addressed, all wrongdoing will stopped, and perfect peace and harmony is all that will remain. We wait for the day that Jesus comes to bring this ultimate and final victory, and so we end with the same prayer with which the book of Revelation ends: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

What has been the most helpful or impactful part of this series in your spiritual walk?