Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 25  
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Revelation 19:11-21  
The Warrior and the Battle

Introduction

In chapter 19, and verses 11 to 21, we are introduced to the climax of chapters 17 and 18 and the first part of 19. Chapters 17 and 18 focused on the destruction of Babylon/Rome itself. Now it seems that chapter 19 verses 11 through 21, will be devoted to the judgment of its allies, to the judgment of the nations that committed adultery with it. So, first Babylon gets judgment in 17 and 18, and that becomes a model for now the judgment that will fall on the rest of the world, and particularly on those that were its allies, and that were seduced to commit adultery with it. So chapter 19 does not represent something that chronologically happens after chapters 17 and 18. As far as if we see chapters 17 and 18 as representing Rome against the backdrop of the end of the world and in that sense, chapter 19 followed the destruction of historical Rome, but on the other hand, if we understand the destruction of Rome also including the final destruction of Babylon at the end of the world then chapters 19 is a natural corollary to that. And so, again, chapters 17 and 18 are the destruction of Babylon/Rome, but then also the rest of the earth receives judgment to all long with it, and that's where chapter 19 comes in about in chapter 19, verses 11 through 21.

Structure: Two Sections 19:11-16; 17-21

In chapter 19, verses 11 through 21, all the forces of evil and all of humanity is in opposition to God and his people. They are all a rebellious, prideful, idolatrous humanity that opposes God and oppresses his people and are now the subjects of God’s judgment in chapter 19 of this section. This chapter or the section of our chapter 19:11-21 can be divided into two parts. The first part in verses 11 through 16 is the description of the main character and that is the warrior who is Jesus Christ that comes seated on a white horse, and he is described in detail. Then finally in verses 17 and following the battle itself is
described which we’re going to see in the moment is not really much of a battle. The battle will end before it really ever begins. So be aware of these sections, verses 11 to 16; the description of the warrior who comes out to do battle that is the rider on the white horse, and then second, verses 17 and following where the battle itself is described.

Focus on the Warrior: Jesus Christ

The way this section is set up, I would suggest to you that the focal point of this section is not the battle itself, in verses 17 and following, but the description of the warrior of Jesus Christ the rider on the white horse in verses 11 to 16. His description is the most prominent element and the focal point of chapter 19. Now, chapter 19, verse 11, then begins with an important feature and that is verse 11 says, “I saw heaven open.” The other place we found that language was back in chapter 4 in verses 1 and 2 where John sees heaven open and he then summoned up to heaven to see a vision where he sees the divine throne room. This mention of heaven being open, I think, is a crucial feature and marks a crucial section and climax of the book of Revelation. That is, beginning with chapter 19, verse 11, in my opinion the rest of the book of Revelation is going to be about a series of images that portray the effects of the return of Christ at the end of history.

Second Coming

So I think verse 11 in chapter 19 is the introduction of that. By having heaven open, it marks a new significant scene like it did back in chapter 4. Yet now this scene with heaven open will not result in John going up and seeing a heavenly world. It now results in Christ returning to consummate God's plan for the end of history. God's redemptive plan for history, results in judgment and salvation. So, as I said, after chapter 19:11, everything from now on occurs at the second coming of Christ, and what we’re going to find is a number of scenes that, once again, starting here lead up to chapter 21. There are a number of scenes that don't necessarily follow chronologically after each other. In other words; there are a number of scenes that do not necessarily portray events that follow in chronological order, but instead it's as if the author draws on a number of images to interpret and explain what happens at the second coming of Christ, or what is the meaning of Christ's second coming. What does it accomplish? What are its results?
The author will seek, through a number of scenes, to take different images to explore the meaning of the coming of Christ in bringing history to an end, to come to consummate God’s redemptive plan. Chapter 19, verse 11, begins a significant section and actually could have its own chapter division, I think. But, what I want to do then is read chapter nineteen as we read other sections so that you get the flow of the text and you are sort of able to visualize and feel the effect of the text rather than just jumping in and try and analyze all its details. So chapter 19, starting with verse 11, and this is John's description of the final judgment scene.

Text of Revelation 19:11ff

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.”

So that's the description of the warrior of the main figure of Jesus Christ who comes to do battle. Then verse 17: “And I saw an angel standing in the sun, [this section will be the description, the battle] who cries it out in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair. ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great. Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the white horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. [in Revelation 13] With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the
sword that came out of the mouth of the rider [on the white horse], and all the birds
gorged themselves on their flesh.”

Jesus as Warrior

Now, interestingly, those of us who are more prone to think of Jesus in terms of
the image of the gospel, of the gentle lamb or someone who has children gathered around
him and one who says “take upon you my yolk because it is light” were not prepared for
the vision of the Son of Man or the vision of Jesus that we see now in chapter 19 because
he is presented now anything but the gentle Shepherd or the kind Jesus who holds
children and who says some of things he does in the Gospels. Although even as you read
the Gospels there are places where Jesus warns of coming judgment, but there's really
nothing to prepare us for the vision of Jesus that we see here. Seldom will you find this
picture of Jesus on the stained-glass windows or portraits hanging in our churches. We
would rather see Jesus holding the lamb or something like that. But now we see Jesus
coming in all his glory at the end of history, riding a white horse, deliberately coming out
to do battle against the rest of the world and against his enemies.

The fact that he is on a white horse is clearly suggestive of its connection
elsewhere with Revelation. We've all already seen the role horses play in battle scenes.
For example, in the first seal of chapter 6 of Revelation, the rider comes out on the horse
and he's clearly dressed in a white robe and holds a bow and arrow. He’s clearly bent on
warfare and destruction. In chapter 9, we saw a demonic cavalry, horses and riders that
clearly the author linked with demonic beings. So a rider on the horse in Revelation is
clearly evocative of conquest and warfare and defeat. But now we see that, in contrast, to
the Roman Empire, in contrast to the demonic cavalry, now Jesus comes out on his horse,
and he comes out to do battle and to defeat his enemies.

I suggested to you that verses 11 through 16 are probably the focus of the section.
That is, the main focus is not going to be on the battle and the war. In fact, we will see
that there's really not much of a battle, it’s really not a war at all. I want to suggest you
what this warfare imagery might be symbolizing and indicating; that the focus of this
chapter is on the description of the warrior in verses 11 through 16, and the way Christ is
described is through a number of Old Testament texts that particularly refer to God as a warrior.

Second Coming Imagery

Also, the author draws on a couple images from chapter one of Revelation. Remember back in chapter 1? John sees a vision of the Son of Man, described with the sword coming out of his mouth. For example, described with the feet is burnished bronze, and eyes like fire, etc. You find this picked up in chapters 2 and 3. Now what's more, the author has provided a composite picture of Christ from the Old Testament text, but also his description of Christ back in chapter 1.

To describe Christ as the one who is both able to defeat his enemies, but is also completely just in doing so, that's important. Christ is not just portrayed here as this colossal warrior who is able to come and defeat his enemies. Yes, that's part of it to show that Christ is able and powerful enough and strong enough to defeat his enemies but the author will draw on language that shows that he is just in doing so. The language of being right and just that we saw that back in chapters 18 and 19, God was praised as being just and holy and righteous in his defeat or judgment on Babylon/Rome. Christ is both able but also just in defeating his enemies in a final all out war.

Again, here we are at the end of history, here we find the second coming, the consummation of history that the rest of revelation has pointed to, that we've seen snippets of, that are our appetite has been wetted to finally see and now we’re not disappointed. We see a full disclosure of the final battle. In the form of other judgment scenes, we've already seen this event anticipated, starting in the sixth seal about in chapter 6, in the Day of the Lord, in the defeat of the enemies. We saw this anticipated back in chapter 17, where all the nations gathered to defeat the Lamb, yet the Lamb defeats them without a struggle. Back in chapter 14, we see the Saints emerging victorious, standing with the Lamb, so we have seen this scene anticipated several times throughout Revelation, but now, finally, we find a fuller portrait that we have been waiting for.
I just want to draw attention to several of the ways that Jesus is described in demonstrating his ability but also his justice in the final battle scene. First of all, note that he is called faithful and true and also the one who judges and makes war in righteousness. This is language coming right out of the Old Testament from a number of Psalms indicating Jesus or indicating God as the one who now in righteousness is the one who is faithful now making war.

Isaiah Background

There is probably a specific allusion to Isaiah chapter 11, an Old Testament text that plays a crucial role all over the book of Revelation. Hopefully you're beginning to pick up on chapter 11, verse 4 of Isaiah. Interestingly, it begins with, in chapter 11 verse 1, “a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him.” Verse three, “And he will delight in the fear the Lord, he will not judge by what he sees with his eyes are decided by what he hears with his ears.” And here's verse 4 of Isaiah 11, “but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor in the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.” In verse 5, “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” So notice here that the messianic figure from Isaiah chapter 11 is now portrayed in terms of one who judges righteously, one who judges with fairness, especially judging for the needy and the poor and slaying the wicked.

Background from Elsewhere in Revelation

So chapter 19, in similar language of faithfulness and righteousness and justice, now God is portrayed as coming to bring judgment; to vindicate his people, and now to punish his enemies. The fact that his eyes are like flames of fire is probably another judgment motif. We saw that back in chapter 2:18 through 23. Christ's coming with eyes like flames of fire was the main figure of speech and the main image used to address that church because of their situation, but it goes back to chapter 1 and verse 13, where John says, “among the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were
white like wool, as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire.” So now we see this portrait of the Son of Man coming as a mighty judge, and coming now as a warrior who in righteousness and justice will decide on behalf of his people, his saints, and will do so in a way that brings judgment upon the nations of the earth.

Note the fact that he’s also described as having crowns on his head. We’ve seen elsewhere that different individuals had crowns. Note specifically the beast himself, who had seven heads, with crowns on them. Now Jesus is described as the one who has crowns on his head, so, probably, we’re to see a parody between the beast who had seven crowns. He goes out and conquers. He makes war with the saints, and he claims divine status; but now Jesus Christ comes in direct contrast with crowns on his head, demonstrating his power and his sovereignty over all the nations, and that now he is able to judge it.

The Unknown Name

One interesting feature is the fact that Christ described as having a name that no one knows. I don't want go into all of the details and suggestions of what that name might be, but intriguingly, we've seen already the significance of a name of throughout the book of Revelation. For example, there is the name on the foreheads of the people of God. Isaiah chapter 62 in verse 2, we find emphasis on a new name. Now the new name is applied to Christ, but it's a name that no one knows. The idea here might not be so much that this is a mysterious name that no one can possibly figure out. The background of this is to know someone's name would be to have control over that person or authority over that person, and especially in the context of being able to name or naming a demon would be to have control over that demon or that god or something like that. So by saying that Christ has a name that no one knows, the emphasis is not so much on that it's mysterious and Christ has a name that no one is ever going to be able to figure out. The idea of naming, not knowing what that name means, is another way of saying of Jesus Christ that no one has authority over him. Jesus Christ has complete control. He is absolutely sovereign. The fact that no one can name his name signifies his complete and absolute
sovereignty over all the nations of the earth and over all the powers of evil, including the
dragon and the two beasts which we’ll see he deals with in just a moment.

There are two other features to draw your attention to by way of images. One is
Jesus Christ is described as having his robe dipped in blood. That's intriguing that Jesus
Christ is described as having robe dipped in blood before he ever engages in warfare,
before the battles is even described. Maybe this is a reference to other battles he's been
involved in. One suggestion is that this blood is actually his own blood, and that’s part of
the debate. Whose blood is this, on Jesus’ robe? One suggestion is that this is Jesus’ own
blood. So once more, we find that the ironic way in which Jesus conquers, he conquers
through his own death, he conquers through his own blood on the cross, and so the blood
here should be understood as Jesus own blood that he sheds at his death. Once more
describing the ironic way in which he overcomes, and not like Rome, but now he will
overcome through his own suffering and death.

Isaiah 63: Background: Blood on Robe

However, I think the key to understanding the blood on Christ’s robe before he
ever gets into battle, interestingly, and I'll return to that, is to pay attention to the Old
Testament context. That is here Isaiah chapter 63, seems to be the background, verses 1
through 3 for the depiction of Jesus. We've already seen that chapter 63 of Isaiah has
provided the background for the grape harvest back in the end of chapter 14, the vision of
the grape harvest in the treading of the winepress of God’s wrath, so that what comes out
is not the juice from the grapes, but what comes out is the blood of the enemies. This
background seems, in Isaiah 63:1-3, seems to be reflected in this description of Christ’s
robe that is already dipped in blood. Let me read chapter 63 of Isaiah again, which
anticipates a day of vengeance, a day of Judgment, when God will return to punish his
enemy. “Who is this coming from them Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained
crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength?
It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save. Why are your garments red, like those
of one treading the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no
one was with me. I have trampled them in my anger, and trod them down in my wrath;
their blood has splattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.” So in other words, if we are to understand the judgment scene back in chapter 14 of the treading of the winepress and resulting in the blood of the enemy. Perhaps we should understand the blood on Jesus robe, his robe dipped in blood, here in chapter 19 in the same way. That the blood is not his own blood. It could be and you could make a good case for that, but the blood primarily is the blood of his enemies in fulfillment of Isaiah 63. The blood of his enemies is a result of God’s wrath, of the God trampling the winepress of his wrath and bringing judgment on enemies. Now, this seems strange, how can you have Christ’s garment dipped in blood, before he ever defeats his enemies? I would suggest this is just part of the apocalyptic symbolism that we don't need to be so literal in suggesting “how does he have the blood of his enemies before he ever fights them?” Remember John is describing the Jesus Christ here. John is not interested in giving us a precise, detailed a logical account where I know you can’t have Christ with blood on his garments before he ever fights. John is simply interested in drawing on Old Testament texts to demonstrate, to describe the warrior, to demonstrate his ability and his justice in bringing about war, and, so, part of that is simply due to his allusion back to Isaiah 63. And John is now describing Jesus as the warrior in fulfillment of Isaiah 63, and to do that, he draws on an image of his garment dipped in blood, even before he has ever defeated his enemies. But already he is saying something about the nature of Christ as the one, in fulfillment of Isaiah 63, is about to come in and slay and judge God's enemies.

The other interesting feature to draw attention to is, and I think is crucial and important for understanding the background of this, and that is the fact that Christ is described as having a sword coming out of his mouth. We saw that this is part of the description of Jesus back in Revelation chapter 1, and also gets picked up in chapters 2 and 3 in relationship to one of the churches. But the image of the sword coming out of his mouth clearly depends upon Old Testament texts but also seems to portray this as primarily a judgment scene. We will pick that up in just a moment. But Isaiah, chapter 49, in verse 2 appears to be one of the text that John is drawing on. Isaiah, chapter 49 and verse 2. “He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid
me; he made me like a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.” But that first part he made my mouth like a sharpened sword, and back in the text that we just read, Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11 in verse 4, “but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.” So now Jesus is portrayed as having a sword coming out of his mouth as an image of the one who comes to execute justice.

So, as we've already seen it would be rather ludicrous to try to present or construct a literal picture of Christ. I'm not sure this is the Jesus I want to see with the sword coming out of his mouth. I mean how are we to understand this? Earlier on in chapter 5, isn’t he a slain lamb? Doesn’t he have the seven spirits and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits. So you have a slain lamb, now he's wearing seven crowns and he has a sword coming out of his mouth. Is Jesus able to morph into different forms, or how do we understand this? John is using symbolism, primarily from the Old Testament as well as other apocalyptic literature, to say something about the person of Jesus Christ, who he is and what he does. So John is borrowing language from the Old Testament portraying a picture of Christ as one who comes to execute justice and righteousness, comes to execute God's judgment upon the earth, and upon people who oppose him, and on a rebellious, wicked humanity. So now the sword is an image of judgment. Interestingly, the sword coming out of his mouth may also have led the author to the next text and that is Psalm chapter 2 when the author says in verse 15 out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which he strikes down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter, a clear allusion to Psalm chapter 2 and verse 8.

So, John has described Jesus Christ, using Old Testament language that portrays him as a mighty warrior coming to execute justice. God's justice coming to execute, in the form of a battle, justice upon the earth by judging God's enemies and all these Old Testament texts which have been drawn from those sorts of contacts now cumulatively by describing Christ as a mighty warrior.

One other feature to draw attention to is a rather intriguing; rather two other
features, interestingly, in verse 13: “His name is the Word of God.” Besides the John's Gospel, this the only other place you find Jesus referred to as “the Word.” John chapter 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Now you find the word of God appearing again or the Word, the logos, as now referring to Jesus Christ. This is the only place outside of John where this happens. The other interesting feature is that later on in the text, the rider on the white horse is described as, I'm trying to locate the exact verse, where he is described as having his army follow him. Jesus Christ comes riding a white horse and his army, the army of heaven follows after him.

The “Armies”

Now there are two things to say about this. Interestingly, first of all, note that, and we'll pick this up later, note that the army apparently doesn't do anything. The army does not appear to actually be involved in any fighting or in battle. The army is described as following Christ, but it doesn't actually do anything. Verse 14 was the verse I was looking for. “The armies of heaven were following him.” But notice the army is, despite what Grant Osborne says in his commentary, that apparently the army has a role in the defeat of the enemy. But the text is not clear on that, in fact, it almost says the opposite. It's Christ himself who defeats the enemies. And besides, after the way he's been described in verses 11 to 16, who needs an army to defeat the enemies. But it's intriguing that he's described, perhaps just adding to the battle scene in the battle imagery. He's described as having the armies of heaven, following him, although they do nothing. They don't seem to play a role in the battle.

The second thing to say about these armies is there is debate as to whether this army should be understood as the people of God, the saints themselves, or whether they are angelic beings. It appears to me that, although some commentaries say it's a combination of both, the fact that they are described as being dressed, notice in verse 14, “in fine linen, white and pure” would suggest to me that this is a vision of the saints themselves. This would add to the scene of vindication. The saints themselves accompany Christ when he avenges their blood when he vindicates them by now judging
their enemies. But as we said they really don't do anything at all. The warrior is completely sufficient for doing battle.

The Battle: Ezekiel 38-39 Background

Now at the end of verse 16, we are now prepared for a description of the battle. We now have the warrior described. We have been presented with the warrior, the one who is both able and just in executing God's judgment on the earth, and vindicating the saints who suffered at the hands of their enemies. Now God is described as the one who is perfectly capable as well as righteous and just to carry this out in fulfillment of the Old Testament. Now in verses 17 to the end of the chapter, we find the description of the battle itself.

Again, I simply want to make a handful of comments regarding the battle. First of all, the book of Ezekiel, we've seen, has played a crucial role throughout the book of Revelation to the extent that, unlike the way that John seemed to use Isaiah were he uses it more thematically, where he'll gather texts from different places in Isaiah at different places in Revelation to support thematically what John saw, and what John is trying to describe. Unlike that, Ezekiel has played a crucial role to the extent that John largely follows it in the order of the text of Ezekiel itself. We saw in chapter 4 and 5, John draws on Ezekiel 1 and 2 for a description of the throne room, and in Ezekiel 9, or in Revelation 7. John has drawn on Ezekiel 9 for the imagery of the sealing, of the 144,000 for protection. We’ve seen that in chapters 17 and 18, John has drawn on the Ezekiel 27 for the description of the downfall of Babylon or the downfall of Tyre, the judgment of Tyre in economic terms. Now, John will draw on Ezekiel 38 and 39, which also describes a battle scene an end-time battle.

After chapter 37 in Ezekiel we read about the restoration of Israel in the term of raising up the dry bones and putting flesh on them and giving them life. Following that imagery in chapters 38 and 39, we find the language of an end-time battle, so Ezekiel 39 is the primary model behind Revelation chapters 19 and 17 through 21. For example, when you read Ezekiel 39, and I just want to read a handful of verses here and there that illustrate clearly I think the connection. Chapter 39 and starting with verse 4: “On the
mountain of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals.” And dropping down to verse 17: “Son of man,” actually, this is the title used to address Ezekiel. “Son of man [Ezekiel], this is what the sovereign Lord says: ‘Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals assemble!’ [Here is the callout.] “Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of the mighty men, and drink the blood of all the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls--all of them fattened animals from Bashan. At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are glutted and drink blood until you’re drunk. At my table, you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind, declares the sovereign Lord.”

Hopefully you picked up the imagery here in chapter 19 verses 17, actually, 17 to 18 which is actually only a preparation for the battle, that is, in preparation for the onslaught and carnage in warfare about to take place. Now in verses 17 and 18, an angel, unlike Ezekiel during it in chapter 39, now an angel calls upon the birds to come and prepare for a feast that will now ensue, as a result of the end-time battle. It's difficult not to read this language of the feast or a great supper, in contrast to the supper or the feast of the Lamb back at the beginning of chapter 19. Now we find another feast or supper, but now the guests that are invited are not the nations. They are the feast, and the birds are the ones invited, but John is clearly drawing on Ezekiel for this imagery. The language of carrion or birds gathering to feast themselves. It is simply part of the image of the symbol of the carnage and destruction that will take place as a result of the battle. But the verses 17 and 18 are only the preparation, 19 and 21 will narrate the battle. But the author wants to make clear he's drawing on Ezekiel 39 for this imagery of end-time battle.

The other thing to mention that is truly helpful. You begin to see that John here is using symbolic language, so we should not literally think of a time where there will literally be birds that come somewhere on the earth to somehow gorge on the corpses of the warriors and soldiers who have been put to death. But John is using language imagery
and symbolism from another apocalyptic type book in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Specifically here, to simply depict the finality, the extent of and the complete destruction of the final judgment the rider on white horse will bring upon the people. So that's the first thing Ezekiel chapter 38 and 39 function as the primary models, as the primary text that John draws upon to construct his vision of the end-time battle.

The Battle

The second thing that we have already mention is noticed that no fighting takes place. This is no normal battle. This is a very unusual battle. In most battles you have the armies lining up and there are casualties on both sides. There is a skirmishing in conflict until one side emerges victorious. That is not what takes place here at all. There's no fighting at all. Instead, the Lamb simply comes down, and with the sword that comes out his mouth he slays his enemies. In Ezekiel chapter thirty eight, actually the enemies are destroyed by fire, we’ll see that will get picked up later on in chapter 20. But now John in his battle scene describes the defeat of the enemies, not by the armies that follow Christ. There's no fighting that takes place with casualties on both sides. It is simply the Lamb comes, and with the sword that comes out of his mouth, he defeats the enemy.

I think this is helpful in responding to attempts to wonder whether this or that war or threat of war might be Armageddon, might be the final war I like to tell people if the war starts, and there's casualties in fighting, you can pretty much be sure. It’s not an end-time battle because the entire battle does not have any fighting. Christ simply comes in, with a sword from his mouth, and slays his enemies. So when we see wars, when we see actual battles taking place or threats of battles, I think we can be pretty sure that that is not the last one because the last one is like no battle that history has ever seen. There is no fighting by your two armies. The Lamb simply returns and slays or judges his enemies with the sword that comes out of his mouth.

The third thing I want to observe, I want to make out about this end-time battle scene, is, in my view, in light of the Old Testament text used, and especially in light of the imagery of a sword, the way that Christ defeats his enemies is from the sword coming out of his mouth. In my opinion, then and in my judgment, this end-time battle is not
referring to any literal battle at all, whether in heaven or on earth or for any kind of spiritual battle. This is not referring to a literal battle at all, but I think the author is using battle imagery to symbolize and depict the final judgment of Jesus Christ. That he simply speaks with a word of his mouth. So, this is to be seen, not primarily as a battle literally, but the author is using battle language to describe the complete judgment and the final judgment of God's enemies that Jesus brings about, that Jesus executes simply by speaking the word. So I think what we have here is primarily a judgment scene of Christ speaking the word of judgment on the world and that now is portrayed or symbolized by the language of a great battle. I think that's very important that we understand that the battle imagery is being used to symbolize something very specific and that is a judgment not a literal end-time conflagration or great work or conflict or battle, but this is simply a judgment that occurs when Christ speaks the word of judgment.

Judgment of the Beast and False Prophet

First of all, the first enemies that God disposes or judges in chapter nineteen, is the beast and the false prophet who appear to be the ones who have gathered the warriors together and now are prepared to mount a final war. Now, in verse 20, first of all, the beast is captured and then the false prophet from chapter 13. This would also suggest that the beast and the false proper from chapter 13, all though they are identified with Rome, and perhaps of those in the Roman provinces that are keen to enforce Emperor worship and to draw attention to the beasts of the Roman Empire. The beast number one symbolizes Rome, perhaps, and the Emperor. It is intriguing that now they actually are present at the final end-time judgment, suggesting once more that the beastly figures are more than just Rome. They are the same beast that inhabited and energized and inspired other nations in the past, in Israel's history, other godless, and idolatrous oppressive nations. Now, once again, they have surfaced in the form of the Roman government and Roman Empire, and now they are portrayed as being subject to the final judgment that now comes as result of Jesus Christ's second coming. So, first of all, the beast and the false prophet, other names for the two beasts in Revelation 13, are thrown into the lake of fire. We'll talk more about the lake of fire when we get to Revelation chapter 20, where it
emerges again.

But at this point there are two observations to debate. Notice that, you may have wondered, what about the dragon? You have the two beasts being removed, but what about the dragon? While we have to wait for the dragon until the next chapter just a few verses later in chapter 20 the dragon will be deposed of. Interestingly, what you have John doing is almost literary, is the posing of the beast and the dragon in the opposite manner in which they were introduced, opposite order. In chapter 12, the dragon is introduced and then in chapter 13 the two beasts. Now in their removal, the beast are removed first in chapter 19. Then, the dragon will get removed and judged in chapter 20. So that's why you don't find the dragon appearing here because John is going to progressively see evil removed. It begins with Babylon being removed in chapter 17 and 18 and judged. Then it begins with the rest of the world being judged. It also entails the removal, first of all, of the two beasts. Then finally, Satan himself will get removed in chapter 20 in a progressive scene of the removal of evil in the form of judgment.

Removal of All Evil

A second, also, what is going on here is, this is simply, as I said before, I think symbolic of God's removal of all evil and God's judgment of all evil. So I don't think we should prepress the chronology as if literally the beast and false prophet will be judged first and then some time later, the dragon or sometime later the nations. But once more, the author is trying to demonstrate through a series of images what we find happening at the end of history, and that is, the complete judgment and the complete removal of all that is evil. Now he, as I said, anticipates that not through literal fighting or literal carnage, but that the language of judgment and the language of battle is used to demonstrate the swift and decisive nature of God's judgment, and, here, of defeating the powers of the beastly figures, the first and second beast, the beast and false prophet, who inspired it, and who actually laid behind the oppressive activities and the murderous attempts of the Roman Empire to destroy and defeat God’s people. So naturally, they go into judgment first, and then following them in verse 20 the rest of them were killed with the sword that comes out of the mouth of the rider again, symbolizing judgment that Christ simply
speaks the word of judgment and all of his enemies that have opposed God and his people, they are finally defeated.

So what is going on here is as I said the progressive removal of evil in the form of judgment scenes that will prepare the way for the emergence of the new creation in chapter 21. When you get to the end of chapter 20, all of evil has been removed. All of evil has been judged. There's nothing left of an oppressive, godless, idolatrous, and wicked Empire and the earth that it ruled over. That has all been removed and scenes of judgment, so that now the only thing left is for a new creative act of God to bring about the inheritance and the reward of his people who were faithful and who refused to give in to the beast and its demands.

Conclusion

The last thing I want to say about chapter 19:11-21, especially 17 to 21 that narrates the battle which we said is really not a battle at all in the way it is narrated as well as what it symbolizes. It's meant to symbolize a final judgment and not a literal battle. It is a question we raised back in the chapter 16. That is starting in chapter 16, and I would add chapter 17 as well, we saw that the kings of the earth colluded with the beast. They allied with the beast to make war with the Lamb. So I want to include that text as well. But starting in chapter 16 verse 14, if you remember, as part of the six bowl judgments, that out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, the unholy Trinity came three frogs. They were able, in reflection of an exodus plague, they were able to deceive the nations into gathering for a battle that then the author describes in chapter 16 as the battle of Armageddon, probably borrowing an Old Testament concept of the famous place of battle now blown up in the apocalyptic proportions as the scene of a final battle. But we saw in verse 16, there was no battle described, it only mentioned the gathering of them for battle and you didn’t see a description of the battle. Then in towards the end of chapter 17, we find a brief mention of the battle that I just mentioned. In verse twelve the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet free that receive the kingdom, but for one hour they will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will
make war against the Lamb.

So the beast and these kings of the earth symbolized by the ten horns will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. Which is similar to the name, and in fact, his exact name found on Jesus robe in verse 16 of chapter 19. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

So we have two battles so far. First, chapter 16, the battle of Armageddon, where the nations are gathered, the kings are gathered for a war by the frogs that come from the dragon and the two beasts. Then in chapter 17, we have a battle between the beast, and his ten kingdoms and the Lamb where they are defeated. Now in chapter 19, we’re introduced to another battle in verses 11 through 21, another battle where the one seated on the horse, that is, Jesus Christ himself, the Word of God comes to do battle and simply defeats the enemies who have been gathered against them. And, notice verse 19, “then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth.” Probably the kings from chapter 17, those ten kings. “And their armies gathered together to make war against the rider.” So that ten kings just symbolizing all the kingdoms, the complete number of kings, and now you have this picture at the end of the world, with all the earth gathered to do battle.

Then in chapter 20 in verse 8, starting at verse 7. “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released and he will go out and deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for the battle.” Then what happens is they go up to the city of the saints, and fire comes from heaven, and simply devours them.

So what is going on? How many battles are there? Are these four different battles? Are there series of battles leading up to the end-time? Are there two battles or are there three battles? Do some of these overlap as one battle? In my opinion, I think we should understand all these battles as referring to the same event. They all have the theme of Satan and or the beast, deceiving and gathering the nations in order to do battle, and then they are simply defeated without engaging in any warfare. So I think chapter 16, the battle of Armageddon, where the beast gathers them together, then, is further depicted in chapter 17, where the beast and the ten Kings wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb who is King of kings and Lord of lords defeats them. Now we see the battle narrated
again, a third time in the same battle, but a fuller narrative. In chapter 19, now the King of kings and Lord of lords goes out where the beast and the ten kings have gathered as an army once again. Note that theme of gathering an army and that the beast and/or Satan is involved in that, and they are simply slain by the Lamb. And notice, in all of these there is no warfare taking place. Then finally, I would suggest you, that chapter 20 is the same end-time battle. Notice again, that Satan deceives the nations as he did in chapter 16, the battle of Armageddon. Satan deceives the nations to gather them for battle. Notice the theme of gathering them for battle, prepared for war, and they are simply defeated.

By the way, the other thing that links the battle in chapter 20 back to the one in chapter 19, is the fact that the same Old Testament text lies behind both of them, Ezekiel 38-39. So I take it that all of these refer to the exact same end-time battle looking at them from different perspectives.

We are going to have to ask why the author narrates the battle for a fourth time in Revelation 20. We’ll talk about that in our next discussion. Chapter 19, then ends with the first result, again chapter 19, and verse 11 begins a new section on Revelation, a series of images. A series of scenes that depict what happens at the parousia or the coming of Jesus Christ. And the first scene here in nineteen, eleven through twenty one, portrays the final judgment that will be the result of Christ's coming. Now there is still quite some cleaning up to do. We’ll see chapter twenty. We’ll still have scenes of judgment in them, but already we find that the final judgment of all evil, the removal of all evil, beginning to prepare the way for the emergence of a new creation in chapters 21 and 22.