

Is The War That Christ Fights a Real Military Battle?

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 19:11

September 30, 2012

Rev. Greg L. Price

What is the war that Christ fights in Revelation 19:11ff? Is this war a mere spiritual battle between Christ and the devil like the spiritual unseen war that is depicted in Ephesians 6:11-12? There is no doubt at all that an on-going battle in the spiritual realm between Christ and the devil is being fought. And just because it is spiritual and unseen does not mean that it is not real. It is very real. And we daily see this battle as the devil seeks to destroy us who belong to Christ, and sets before us every manner of temptation outwardly and inwardly in leading us away from the Captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ. That is why we cannot stand in our own strength against such a foe as the devil and against all of his wicked hosts and the corruption of our own flesh. We must daily be prepared to do battle against all such enemies that would deceive us, mislead us, and discourage us, that would tempt us and cast us into the snares of sin in order to shame us and make us ineffective in our testimony before man concerning Christ's grace and power to save even the chief of sinners.

Yes, dear ones, there is a very real battle that is being fought in the spiritual realm which most people have not the eyes to see. And when we as Christians awaken to a new day, and due to our own negligence fail to prepare ourselves for battle by forgetting to spend time with the Lord in putting on the full armor of God, we go forth to face the onslaught of that powerful enemy of our soul like Samson trying to fight the Philistines (after Delilah had cut his hair). We like Samson will be weak as the weakest of men. And the enemies of Christ will mock us and make fun of our testimony for Christ, because we did not prepare ourselves for battle. The victory belongs to Christ, and we only overcome the enemy through faith in Christ and His promises. But let us daily be spiritually armed to do battle. Complacency, apathy, lukewarmness, forgetfulness, negligence, and procrastination are the means that the enemy uses to lead us into temptation and sin. How, dear ones, we must not underestimate the gravity of this battle and what is at stake every day. We do so to our own peril, heartache, testimony, and loss of joy and communion with Christ in our day to day Christian life.

Although this spiritual battle is real and is a daily battle that we as Christians face, is that what is depicted here in Revelation 19:11, when the Apostle John writes concerning Christ going forth into battle upon a white horse and waging war in righteousness? That is the question that we would seek to answer this Lord's Day as we continue to consider how Jesus Christ is gloriously displayed as King of kings, and Lord of lords over His enemies in Revelation 19:11ff. The main points for our sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Necessity That Heaven Be Opened ("And I saw heaven opened" Revelation 19:11); (2) The Conquering Jesus Rides Forth to Wage War in Righteousness ("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).

I. The Necessity That Heaven Be Opened ("And I saw heaven opened" Revelation 19:11).

A. We continue an explication of how the human title, "king of kings", as held by King Artaxerxes of Persia (in Ezra 7:12), falls infinitely short of the Divine title, "King of kings, and Lord of lords", as held by Jesus Christ (in Revelation 19:16), who is God's anointed King. As we began our exposition of Revelation 19 (a few sermons previous to this one), we first sought to remove the fog of premillennialism that might blur our vision in clearly understanding the biblical and accurate interpretation of Revelation 19. Having dispelled the fog by the brightness of God's revelation in His Word, let us now proceed to a scriptural understanding of what is revealed about our victorious King of kings, and Lord of lords.

B. In order to have God's understanding of Scripture (and particularly prophetic Scripture) it is necessary that heaven be opened. Heaven was uniquely opened so that the Apostle John might behold the vision of Christ riding upon a white horse and waging war in righteousness. Heaven was not opened here in Revelation 19:11 so that Christ might ride through the parted heavens to earth, but rather heaven was opened so that John might see the revelation of Christ's victory made known in the many symbols used in this passage. After John sees heaven opened, there are revealed eleven chronological events that follow one after another in Revelation 19:11 through Revelation 22:8 (all beginning with the phrase, "and I saw" Revelation 19:11,17,19; 20:1,4,11,12; 21:1,2,22; 22:8). John saw by way of revelation all of these prophetic events unfold before him in this heavenly vision, so that even those prophetic events that occurred on earth (like the destruction of Christ's enemies) were seen in heaven after heaven was opened by revelation to John.

1. Dear ones, unless God had opened heaven for John to see Christ's victory over His enemies, John would not have been able (with his own mere human insight) to see this amazing revelation of Christ riding forth in victory over the beast, the false prophet, and those rebellious confederates with them. But heaven being opened, John could see with absolute certainty Christ's victory.

2. Dear ones, now that God has by revelation opened heaven and has revealed the victory of Him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, there is every reason to be filled with hope, and every reason to dispel all doubt and hopelessness that the enemy may use to discourage us as we face the onslaught of an antichristian nation and world, and antichristian religions all around us. Their days are numbered, because God has opened heaven to behold the vision of Christ's victory over the antichristian civil beast and the papal false prophet. There is coming a time when governments (like the United States) will no longer fight wars so that nations can practice the false religion of Islam or give foreign aid to Islamic nations to build mosques, whose goal it is to eradicate Christianity from the face of the earth. For there is coming a time when even those Islamic nations that now hate Christ will become covenanted Christian nations (Isaiah 19:21-25—Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will be covenanted nations). How do we know this for certain? Because God opened heaven to give us a certain revelation of Christ's victory.

II. The Conquering Jesus Rides Forth to Wage War in Righteousness ("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).

A. Now after heaven is opened unto John, John is given a vision of Christ's victory over His enemies. The language of war is unmistakably used throughout the rest of Revelation 19. What I would like to address in the remainder of this sermon is whether this war that is waged by Christ against His enemies is merely a spiritual battle, or whether this war waged by Christ is also outwardly manifested in martial combat? In other words, is the fulfillment of this prophecy to be only realized in the internal victory of Christ over sin, or does the fulfillment of this prophecy await an actual war and political earthquake in which the antichristian civil beast and the papal false prophet will be destroyed by covenanted nations that will be converted to Christ? I will only have time to give a brief overview in answer to this question this Lord's Day.

B. In Revelation 19:11, we read, "and behold a white horse." This is figurative language, but it prepares us for an actual battle.

1. A "white horse" is a symbol of victory and of conquering one's enemies, as we see in Revelation 6:2 ("and he went forth conquering and to conquer"). I submit that Revelation 6:2 refers to the military conquests and extension of the Roman Empire under the imperial rule of Emperors Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus, and Aurelius (beginning in c. 96 a.d. a year or so after John penned the Book of Revelation). For in this first seal (in Revelation 6:2), we see a rider upon a white horse—the rider that sat upon the white horse, which symbolizes victory and conquest, is wearing a crown (literally, a stephanos or a wreath

that was worn by the Roman Emperors). The rider also has a bow in his hand and goes forth conquering and to conquer—extending the Roman Empire deeper into Europe, which began in the reign of Emperor Nerva and reached its pinnacle under Emperor Trajan.

2. Thus, as this vision in Revelation 19:11 is opened, the very first symbol conveys the idea of a conquering King, who goes forth to destroy all rival kings of the earth, for Christ is King over all earthly kings and kingdoms, and uses nations to bring His judgment upon kings, kingdoms, false religion, and apostate churches as is seen in passages like the following: Isaiah 63:1-6 (this was fulfilled in an actual historical judgment that God brought against Edom by means of the armies of Babylon, cp. Jeremiah 49:17-18,22,28,30); Habakkuk 3:3,7,8,11,12,16 (this was likewise fulfilled in the historical judgment that God brought against Israel and the nations that surrounded Israel by means of the Chaldeans or Babylonians, cp. Habakkuk 1:5-6).

C. Note next in Revelation 19:11, “he that sat upon him [i.e. upon the white horse—GLP] was called Faithful and True.” In Revelation 3:14, Jesus identifies Himself to the Church of Laodicea as “the faithful and true witness.” Jesus as our King of kings and Lord of lords is a witness that is faithful and true to His own word. He is not simply a King of almighty power, but is also a King who exercises that almighty power in faithfully keeping all the promises made to His people (“For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” 2 Corinthians 1:20). This is not a King that is even capable of lying or of not keeping His promises made to His people concerning His victory over all His and their enemies. Whereas we have all fallen into the sin of having borne false witness against God and our neighbor, Jesus Christ has never done so and will never do so. It is impossible for Christ to lie. That is why we who trust alone in Christ for our justification, for our sanctification, and for our everlasting inheritance will never, ever be put to shame or disappointed (Romans 9:33). We will inevitably disappoint one another through our unfaithfulness and sin. If we look closely enough at one another, we will be disappointed. But, dear ones, no matter how closely you look at Christ, or how long you look at Christ, He will never disappoint. For He is ever faithful and true, and it is impossible for Him to be anything else (Hebrews 13:8). Thus, whether you are heartbroken over the unfaithfulness you have seen in the life of one whom you trusted, or whether you are heartbroken over your own unfaithfulness, turn to Christ right now, for He is faithful and true. And He as King of kings and Lord of lords uses all authority in heaven and on earth to bring to pass all the promises made to His unfaithful and undeserving people.

D. And finally in Revelation 19:11, it is revealed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that “in righteousness he doth judge and make war.”

1. Christ (as King of kings and Lord of lords) wages war in righteousness in accordance with His own holy nature. He does not wage war upon people, churches, or nations by mistake or out of ignorance (for He knows all things and is the wisdom of God). He does not wage war by an arbitrary caprice, simply because He feels like doing so (for He perfectly does the will of His Father in heaven). He does not wage war by a desire to have what does not belong to Him (for all things in heaven and on earth were created by Him and therefore belong to Him by right). He does not wage war by a passion to usurp an authority that is not His (for all authority in heaven and on earth legally belongs to Him).

a. When Christ’s judgment falls upon a Sodom and Gomorrah, it is for His righteousness sake. When Christ’s judgment falls upon His backsliding people, as it did upon Israel and Judah through the Assyrians and the Babylonians, it is for His righteousness sake. There is no unjust war that Jesus wages against people, churches, or nations (as is true of the nations of this world). When Christ wages war, He has a right to do so, for He has covenanted with His Father to bring all His enemies under His royal scepter (Psalm 110:1,5-6). Christ has already defeated all His enemies legally (*de jure*) through His death and resurrection, and will defeat (*de facto*) in history the beast and the false prophet at this battle (in Revelation

19) before the millennium, and ultimately will defeat all His enemies at His bodily Second Coming (when Satan, sin and death will be cast into hell).

b. When Christ makes war, He not only judges His enemies, but also saves and vindicates His beloved people (who trust alone in Him for their eternal salvation, and who stand with Him in being faithful witnesses in testifying for the truth of Christ and against all defection from Christ). In other words, Christ's righteous war also delivers His elect from bondage to sin, to Satan, to false religion, and to death (which is why we hear the praise of God's people in Revelation 19:1-2—praise that God has manifested His grace in salvation, and praise that God has manifested His righteousness in judging the great whore of Babylon).

D. I submit to you that this is not a mere spiritual battle (in Revelation 19) between Christ and the devil, fought in the unseen world. No, this is a spiritual battle, but one that also manifests itself in an all-out battle, wherein Christ (from His heavenly throne) uses converted nations (who have been transformed by the power of God's Spirit and Christ's gospel) to bring His righteous judgment upon the antichristian civil beast and the papal false prophet (with all those people, churches, and rulers who have become their confederates).

1. Notice from Revelation 19:12 that Christ (as King of kings and Lord of lords) is depicted as having "many crowns" upon His head—thus demonstrating that all kings and rulers of all nations (in their official government and rule) are under Christ's royal and universal dominion. You see, this is not only an internal Kingship over the hearts of individuals who just happen to be kings and rulers of nations, but rather this is a Kingship in which kings and kingdoms in their official capacity are under the royal scepter of Christ. That is why Christ is given the name, "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16).

2. Notice also in Revelation 19:13 that Christ (as King of kings and Lord of lords) is depicted as having His war garments "dipped in blood" (i.e. the blood of those enemies who were slain). This reference to the shedding of the blood of His enemies would also lead us to expect more than a mere spiritual, internal judgment brought against Christ's enemies (just as we saw in Isaiah 63:1-6).

E. According to Revelation 1:1, the Lord Jesus gave this book as a revelation of specific, identifiable events that should shortly begin to come to pass (which did happen in the fulfillment of the First Seal in Revelation 6:2, with the great military victories won under Emperors Nerva through Trajan). Dear ones, the book of Revelation is not an allegory that merely depicts moral principles and spiritual truths that operate internally in the lives of people throughout history. No, these are actual prophetic events (represented by various symbols) that would come to pass in history (and which can only be understood by having one's heart opened by the Holy Spirit to discern how Scripture uses these symbols in other prophetic portions of Scripture). The only proper and accurate key to use in interpreting Scripture is Scripture itself.

F. I submit that this battle in Revelation 19 (wherein Christ rides upon His white horse as King of kings and has his war garments dipped in the blood of His enemies) is the same battle waged by Christ against the civil beast and against the ecclesiastical beast (or false prophet, or the harlot) in other places in the Book of Revelation: Revelation 14:14-20; Revelation 16:16; Revelation 17:14; Revelation 18:1-2. Why do I say this? Because the enemies that are finally conquered and overthrown by Christ in each of these passages are the same enemies that are finally crushed and conquered by Christ in Revelation 19:20.

1. We will spend more time in a future sermon clarifying who these enemies are in the Book of Revelation that are defeated by Christ and cast into hell, but let me now simply identify them for you. They are basically three in number.

a. The beast from the sea with seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 13:1ff (this is the antichristian civil beast that works together with the religious beast to suppress and destroy the faithful witnesses of Christ).

b. The beast from the land with two horns like a lamb in Revelation 13:11ff (this is the Roman Catholic Church, which is also called the false prophet in Revelation 16:13 and Revelation 19:20, and which is also called Mystery Babylon, the great city, and the harlot or mother of harlots in Revelation 17:5).

c. The image of the beast (which is the papacy created by the Roman Catholic Church, which the people of the world worship, in Revelation 13:14-15).

2. Now where in the Book of Revelation judgment is prophesied to fall against one of these enemies, it is prophesied to fall against all of these enemies and to fall at the same time, when Christ rides forth upon His white horse to destroy them (in Revelation 19:20) before the millennium begins (in Revelation 20).

Beloved, in conclusion, if our spiritual eyes are darkened by unbelief and doubt, and all we see is the growth, spread, and oppression of antichristian nations and of false religion, then our view of Christ will be one of a helpless, striving Captain that is trying to defeat His enemies, but just cannot seem to muster the power to do so. Rather than faith and hope beholding Christ riding victoriously upon a white horse, doubt and despair will behold Christ being cast off from His white horse, fleeing on foot before His enemies. Dear one, can you not see that you will only experience the victory of Christ in your life over those besetting sins, over those lusts of the flesh, over those evil thoughts, over the temptation to set that which is wicked before your eyes, over that unruly and filthy mouth, over pride and trusting in the arm of flesh, over fear of man, fear of persecution, fear of loss of health, a loved one, or of a job, and fear of death, when you with the eye of faith and with the eye of hope see Christ riding victoriously on His white horse as He crushes all His enemies? Can you not see that to the extent that your Christ has been thrown off from His white horse and is fleeing before the enemy, to that extent you will only experience defeat and oppression by the enemies of Christ in your life? May the Lord who opened heaven, so that John might behold Christ (as King of kings and Lord of lords) riding forth on His victorious white horse to tread upon and to destroy His enemies, may that same Lord illuminate your mind to behold the victorious King of kings and Lord of lords, so that you can laugh with God at the vain attempts of His enemies to cast Christ from off His glorious white horse. Dear children of the living God, you are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you. Don't give up. Don't quit. Christ rides forth in victory, and no one or nothing can cast Him off His victorious white horse. Let that truth daily fill your mind in the battles you face.

Copyright 2012 Greg L. Price.