

• After the millennium

1. Satan is allowed to be a deceiver again

• The great apostasy – towards the end of the gospel-age

• The church will 'overcome'

• BUT – a brief period when Satan is powerful

• A period of resistance to the church

• 'Foreshadowing' of these events

• During the reign of Ahab and Jezebel

• Opposition to God – Alexander the Great and Antiochus the Great

• Jesus predicted the love of many would grow cold

• Sixth trumpet – persecution and troubles

In Revelation 20:7–10, we have a vision of something that happens after the symbolic thousand years.

1. **Satan is allowed to be a deceiver again.** ⁷And when the thousand years have been completed, Satan will be released from his prison. ⁸Then he will come out to deceive the nations which are in every corner of the earth, nations which are called Gog and Magog. He will gather them together for battle. The number of them will be as the sand of the seashore.

As I understand the matter, this passage confirms the interpretation that I have given of the 'thousand years' – the gospel-age being brought to the point of victory. Because every passage that has dealt with 'the great apostasy' or 'Armageddon' or 'Antichrist' (or whatever other term one might want to use) has placed that day of conflict towards the end of the gospel-age. If here it is at the end of the 'thousand years', that gives a reasonably consistent overall picture. The gospel-age is a time of immense conflict, yet a time when the church of Jesus Christ will 'overcome'. Jesus and his people go out 'conquering and to conquer'. Yet towards the end of the gospel-age Satan is allowed a brief period to do whatever he wishes against the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the picture we have generally throughout the book of Revelation and the New Testament, and to interpret the 'thousand years' as a period of success within the gospel-age fits with the book as a whole.

There are various passages of Scripture that seem to teach that towards the end of the gospel-age there will come a mighty resistance to the church. That resistance is present even now. 'The mystery of lawlessness is already operating', said Paul¹. Many antichrists are already here, according to 1 John².

There were various times when these days were 'foreshadowed'. We may think of northern Israel during the days of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Then there was a rebellion in the second century BC predicted by Daniel chapter 8. Sometimes in these spiritual rebellions there is one particular man who rises up in opposition against God. The prophecy of Daniel predicted that there would be such a person in Israel. Daniel 8:5–8 undoubtedly refers to Alexander the Great. It was in the time of the Greek Empire that there came 'a little horn which grew exceedingly'. Daniel 8:9–14 refers to Antiochus the Great who was the 'antichrist' of the Old Testament period. Jesus predicted that before the fall of Jerusalem there would be a similar period in which the love of many would grow cold. Then there would be an 'abomination of desolation', defiling the temple before it was destroyed.

Certain passages of Scripture predict something similar towards the end of the gospel-age. I interpreted the 'sixth trumpet' of Revelation 9:13–21 as being the troubles that come upon the world at some time before the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, involving both a time of persecution for the church and great trouble for the world. How much of this is **before** the day of gospel- success and

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2 Thessalonians 2:7

2 1 John 2:18

- *A time of both success for the gospel and opposition to the church before Christ's return*

- *Worldwide conflict between sin and righteousness*

- *Seventh king - antichrist*

2. A short but mighty conflict takes place

- *Gog and Magog – symbols of mystery, brutality and hatred of God*

- *Although Gog will march against Israel, he will be utterly defeated*

- *Ezekiel 38-39 – a picture of a last battle of Satan against God*

3. The conflict of the future involves the revival of persecution

how much is **after** is a mysterious question. Maybe we shall never know until it happens! We cannot expect to know everything! The beast of 11:7 and 13:1, 11, the dragon of 12:3, the false prophet of 16:13 and the great prostitute of 17:3 seem to be forces that are at work throughout the history of the church. And yet there is reason to think that there is **both** a time of success for the gospel **and** a burst of opposition against the church before Jesus finally comes. I interpreted 16:12–16 along these lines and said, 'It pictures a time when the church is violently attacked and the entire world is caught up in some great conflict.' The 'battle of Armageddon' (I said) is picture-language taken from Ezekiel 38–39 in which a great battle against the people of God takes place in 'the mountains of Israel'^{□1}. It is a picture of a worldwide conflict between sin and righteousness, between Jesus and his church (on the one side) and Satan and the forces of wickedness (on the other side). I took Revelation 17:10–11 as referring to the same idea. The 'seventh king' was also a way of speaking of 'antichrist'. The prediction of the book of Revelation is that opposition to God will be given its opportunity. 'They receive authority as kings for one hour'^{□2}.

Revelation 20:7–9a predicts that even after the success of the gospel Satan will be allowed one more attempt to destroy the church.

2. **A short but mighty conflict takes place.** The book of Revelation puts it to us in terms of an adaptation and representation of the picture of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39. In Ezekiel the prophet is to preach against 'Gog', king of a place called 'Magog' (both seem to be invented names; 'Magog' means 'Place of Gog'). Gog is head of a place called Meshech and Tubal (the popular idea that these are Moscow is nonsense. The word 'Moscow' does not come from any language in or near Israel; it is first known in the eleventh century AD; Ezekiel was surely using language that was **known** to him. Such interpretations reveal extreme biblical and linguistic ignorance). These nations are **symbols** of mystery, brutality and hatred of God. God predicts that he will defeat Gog. Although Gog will march against Israel, he will be utterly defeated^{□1}. God will allow terrible opposition against his people. 'Gog' is a symbolic combination of all the enemies of God there ever were.

We need not work through Ezekiel 38–39 at this point. It will be enough to say that in the book of Revelation these two chapters are used to present a last battle of Satan against God at the end of a successful story of gospel-victory. Satan is seeking to bring such conflict into the world even now, but is restrained by the preaching of the gospel, and will be defeated for a long time by the preaching of the gospel. But then he will have his chance.

3. **The conflict of the future involves the revival of persecution.** ⁹*And I saw them as they went over the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.* It is picture language. The people of God are pictured as being besieged by a mighty army. It had happened before in the story of Jerusalem, when pagan armies had surrounded the city. Now it happens again – in spiritual conflict.

□1 Ezekiel 38:8, 21; 39:2, 4, 17

□2 17:12

□1 Ezekiel 38:3-9

4. The conflict of the future is won by the intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ

• Opposition against God and His people is consumed by fire

• God's gospel will be totally victorious

4. The conflict of the future is won by the intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ. But fire came down from heaven and burned them up. The exterminating fire of God entirely destroyed and swallowed up the opposition against God and his people. One recalls how those who came to arrest Elisha were devoured by the fire of God. A team of fifty men went to get Elijah but fire consumed them¹. In picture language, the same thing happens in the final conflict with Satan. Satan is eventually destroyed. ¹⁰And the devil, who deceives them, was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet also are thrown. There they will be punished day and night for ever and ever. (The translation 'where the beast and the false prophet also were' is not necessary. There is no 'were' in the Greek. The verb is **assumed**. The most likely assumed verb is 'are thrown'). The lake of fire is the very final stage of God's punishment, and involves final extermination amidst and after immense suffering. Eventually the enemies of God will be 'found no more at all'². As in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the fire of God is like a furnace³, and after its work is fully done, 'the smoke . . . goes up for ever and ever'⁴. God's gospel is totally victorious.

¹ 2 Kings 1:9-10

² 18:21-22

³ Genesis 19:28

⁴ 19:3



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