

Armageddon— Then World Peace

“He gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”
—*Revelation 16:16*

THE BIBLE CONTAINS A number of words and phrases which, because of their almost universal application to human fears, hopes and experiences, are often quoted by the world,

although not necessarily because of a genuine faith or a correct understanding of what they imply. The expression, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares,” is one of these. The phrase “judgment day” is another. Still another is a word we hear of now more frequently than ever before, “Armageddon.”

The word “Armageddon” appears only once in the Bible, which is in our opening text. Two verses prior, reference is made to “the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” In verse 15 the resurrected Jesus declares, “Behold, I come as a thief.” Thus it seems clear that the Armageddon of our text is related to events at the close of the present age, when Christ would return—thief-like, invisibly—and be present to establish his kingdom.

Revelation is a book of symbols, and the Armageddon of our text is no exception to this. We are not to

suppose that the gathering of the nations to a place called Armageddon means that they will be assembled in some particular location. In the symbology of the Bible, places usually represent conditions, and this is true with respect to the “place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” The conditions, or situations, symbolized by places are determined by that which is historically true concerning them. For example, mount Zion in Jerusalem symbolized the kingdom of God because he once ruled his people through the kings of Israel, whose thrones were established in mount Zion.—I Chron. 11:3-5; Ps. 2:6

Armageddon, called Megiddo in the Old Testament, was a battleground in Israel, the site where some of Israel’s most important battles against her enemies were fought. God oversaw and often fought for Israel in these conflicts. A unique fact concerning these battles was that God did not always give Israel the victory. At times his people needed to be punished, and he permitted them to be defeated. Whether a victory or defeat resulted, however, God directed the outcome of the campaigns fought by the Israelites at the valley of Megiddo.—Judg. 5:19; II Kings 23:29,30; II Chron. 35:22; Zech. 12:11

The battles which Israel fought and which God directed in the valley of Megiddo are used in the Scriptures to point forward to Armageddon. The symbolic Armageddon is a great world conflict at the end of this present age in which God takes a part and directs. The divine purpose for Armageddon is that it will bring about a glorious triumph of righteousness through the establishment of the long-promised Messianic kingdom.

NOT TRUE IN THE PAST

Among the people of the professed Christian world, the claim was made in the past that God fought with and for their armies when they went to war. The incongruity of this is that usually it was a case of one Christian nation fighting against another, with both sides calling upon God to help them. The soldiers on opposite sides of these wars were even taught that if they were killed in battle, they would go directly to heaven.

However, all of this was a deception and in reality a sacrilege against the true God of the Bible. The fact that God directs the issue of the great Armageddon of the Bible in no way implies that he fights for one nation against another. It is simply that there is such a divine overruling in the affairs of the nations as a whole that they are mutually defeated to the point where all concerned finally recognize the failure of human wisdom and planning to establish peace and order throughout the earth. Thus, they ultimately are caused to look to the Lord for help.

When our first parents transgressed divine law and were sentenced to death, the human race lost the benefit of God's directing and protective hand in their affairs. From the fall of man to the closing period of the present age God has not interfered in the affairs of men, except when the course of human selfishness would have been detrimental to the outworking of his plan for the ultimate recovery of his human creation from the result of sin.

Despite the fact that God has not interfered with the course of the world in general, his hand has most surely been involved in the affairs of those individuals and people of faith here on earth. In

every age there have been those who exercised faith in God's promises, and to whom the rewards implied in his promises were esteemed more highly than all the riches of fame, glory, and material possession the world could offer.

God's first veiled reference to this people of faith is found in his statement to "that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan," in the Garden of Eden. He said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."—Rev. 20:2; Gen. 3:14,15

Later God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18) Paul identifies this "seed" of promise as Christ Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior of the world. (Gal. 3:8,16) In a larger sense this seed also includes those of the present age who have exercised a living faith in the promises of God to deliver the world from sin and death. Thus, the apostle further informs us that this promised seed of Abraham is the entire Christ class—Jesus and those who are baptized into his death.—vss. 27-29

RIGHTEOUS PERSECUTED

God said that there would be enmity between the "seed" of the woman—his people—and the "seed" of the serpent—those who, under the influence of Satan, have oppressed and persecuted the people of God. In keeping with this, the true servants of God in every age have been a maltreated people. Any and all of those upon whom the favor of God has been manifested have been the special targets of the Adversary.

This was especially true with respect to Jesus. He was persecuted by the hypocritical religious leaders of his day, those whom he identified as the children of the Devil, the seed of the serpent. (John 8:44) Working through his "seed," Satan did all he could to destroy Jesus, and finally did bring about his crucifixion.

This was by divine permission, however, because in God's plan for the salvation of the human race from death, it was necessary that Jesus die as a Redeemer, that he give himself "a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:3-6) Instead of defeating the divine cause as Satan designed, redemption was provided, and God intervened and raised Jesus from the dead.

Thus, in the case of Jesus, God's hand was manifested in human affairs, not to change events as such, but to accomplish his purpose as centered in Jesus. To a lesser degree this has been true with respect to the people of God in every age. These have been his special care, and whenever it has been necessary, God has intervened in the affairs of men and of nations in order that his purposes in connection with his special chosen ones might be accomplished.

Aside from this, the world in general has been allowed to follow its own selfish and sinful ways, under the rule of the "god of this world," until the end of the present age, and the time for the establishment of Christ's kingdom. (II Cor. 4:4) A prophecy concerning this reads, "The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea roar; he shall prevail against his enemies." Then the Lord speaks through the prophet, saying, "I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself:

now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once.”—Isa. 42:13,14

Notice how, in the text just quoted, the Lord explains that he has held his peace, that he has refrained himself from interfering in human affairs. He also explains that he would not do this forever, that the time would come when he would go forth “like a man of war,” and that he would “prevail against his enemies.”

THE DAY OF VENGEANCE

The prophetic and symbolic Armageddon of the Scriptures belongs to a period in the divine arrangement described as the “day,” or time of God’s vengeance. It is that time foretold by Isaiah when the Lord’s indignation would be upon “all nations, and his fury upon all their armies,” the “day of the LORD’S vengeance.”—Isa. 34:2,8

It is the time foretold by David when he wrote, “Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth.” (Ps. 46:8) The purpose of this period of trouble, however, is not the destruction of individuals, but of selfish and warlike nations; for in the next verse we read, “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.”—vs. 9

Elsewhere in the Scriptures this great “time of trouble” is symbolically represented as a “storm,” as a “whirlwind,” and as a “fire.” (Dan. 12:1; Nah. 1:3; Isa. 66:15) After the present selfish order shall have passed away in this great struggle, God himself, through Christ, will manifest his authority and power for the uplifting and blessing of the distraught masses of the people. Concerning this he has promised,

“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”—Ps. 46:10, *Revised Version*

“WAIT YE UPON ME”

It is during the time when God has refrained from interfering in the sinful and downward course of men and nations that many of the righteously inclined in the world, and even God’s own people, have wondered why evil has been permitted to continue with apparently nothing being done by the Creator to halt human suffering. To these are given this reply: “Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”—Zeph. 3:8,9

In this prophecy of the conflict of nations by which man’s present social order, the symbolic “earth,” is destroyed, it is said to be “devoured with the fire” of God’s jealousy. We know that this does not refer to the destruction of the human race itself, for we are assured by the prophecy that after the “fire” the Lord will “turn to the people a pure language,” and that they will have an opportunity to call upon and serve him. Such would not be possible if they were all destroyed, or if planet Earth was literally burned up.

We also are not to think of God’s “jealousy” as indicating vindictiveness on his part. The Hebrew

word here translated jealousy is the same one that is translated “zeal” in Isaiah 9:7, where we read, “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” What is it that will be performed by the Lord’s zeal? This prophecy answers: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:6,7

This is one of the divine promises of the kingdom of Christ, that world government, the responsibility for which rests upon the “shoulder” of Christ following his promised return. Throughout the centuries Satan and his “seed” have endeavored to thwart the purpose of God to establish his rule of righteousness over the earth. They have done this by persecuting and destroying those whom God was preparing to be its rulers.

Jesus, the “King of kings” in this government, was put to death. His true followers from among both Jews and Gentiles are promised that if they suffer and die with him they will live and reign with him. (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12) When Jesus was put to death the purpose of God was not thwarted. The “zeal” and power of the Almighty raised him from the dead. At this end of the age those who have suffered and died with him are likewise raised from the dead, to live and reign with Christ. —Rev. 20:4,6

Nothing can hinder the accomplishment of the divine purpose when such power can be, and is used to carry it forward to success. That is why we can have full confidence that world peace through Christ's kingdom will become a reality following the great Armageddon struggle. The "zeal of the LORD of hosts" will most assuredly bring it to pass.

It is this same zeal and power that brought about the miraculous birth of Jesus, and that raised him from the dead when the "seed" of the "serpent" destroyed him. It is the same mighty power that raises Jesus' followers to reign with him. Finally, it will be this power which brings about the destruction of all institutions and influences that could possibly stand in the way of the victorious rule of the Messianic kingdom, that world government of peace and righteousness which will rest upon "his shoulder."

A "PURE LANGUAGE"

The prophecy quoted earlier from Zephaniah 3:9 speaks of the time when God will turn to the people a "pure language." It is through the dissemination of this "pure language" that the people of all the earth learn to know the true God, to call upon, worship, and serve him "with one consent." The people of all nations will be united in the worship of and devotion to their Creator and Lord, not through fear, but because they will respond, saying, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—Isa. 25:9

With the people enlightened concerning God, and desirous of doing his will, they will, through Christ, attain peace with him. To be at peace with God is

a requisite to being at peace with one another. Through obedience to the laws of righteousness, mankind will learn the advantages of love over selfishness. Then, willingly and wholeheartedly they will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks,” and the nations will not “learn war any more.”—Mic. 4:1-4

Peace with God will result not only in peace among people, but also in health and in all of life’s affairs. When, in the Garden of Eden, God turned his back upon his fallen human creatures, condemnation to death also came upon them. In God’s favor is life, the Bible informs us. (Ps. 30:5) The withdrawal of God’s favor resulted in a long nighttime of sin, suffering and death. However, the psalmist continues, “joy cometh in the morning,” the morning of that new day of the Messianic kingdom, when there “shall be no end” to the “the increase of his government and peace.”—Isa. 9:7

During this long waiting period since man’s fall, those who have loved righteousness have often inquired, “How long, O Lord?” and the answer has been, “Wait ye upon me.” Paul wrote, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” (Rom. 16:20) Now the “shortly” period is almost ended. Today the rumblings of the great Armageddon, which signal the end of the reign of sin and death, can be heard. This means that those who hope, by being faithful unto death, to live and reign with Christ as part of the seed of promise, should more than ever “give diligence” to make their “calling and election sure,” knowing that in order to reign with Christ they must be “called, and chosen, and faithful.”—II Pet. 1:10,11; Rev. 17:14 ■