

Covenant Pulpit



Exaltation

The Warrior in the Baby

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On a hot, windy day in 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte climbed to the summit of a hill in Northern Palestine. It was in reality a garbage heap—the decayed rubble of 27 cities, each built atop the ruins of those who were destroyed before it over the past 8,000 years at the bloodiest spot on planet earth. The locals called Napoleon’s little hill *Mount Megiddo*.

As the French conqueror stared across the Valley of Jezreel to the distant mountains of Syria, he was looking at one of the natural wonders of the world: a wide valley as flat as a billiard table that meanders more than 200 miles in length. But it was the military possibilities of this place that caused him to say excitedly to his assembled generals,

“All the armies of the world could maneuver their forces on this vast plain at the same time...There is no place in the whole world more suited for a war than this...[It is] the most natural battlefield on the whole earth...”

Napoleon didn’t know then what modern scholars have since discovered: more armies have fought more battles in this valley than at any other place on earth. Megiddo stood at the crossroads of the ancient trade routes connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe. Whoever held Megiddo controlled the world. Over the millennia more than 200 battles were fought at this place by Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Canaanites, Philistines, Israelis, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantine Emperors and Muslim Caliphs, Christian Crusaders, the French, British, Turks, and Arabs.

It is no wonder that this heap of destroyed cities was called by the ancient Jews *Harmegeddon*—a combination of two Hebrew words: *har* which means mountain, and *megiddo* meaning slaughter. *Harmegeddon*: The Mountain of Slaughter. It’s only mentioned by name once in the Bible in Revelation 16:16.

What Napoleon envisioned on that hill in 1799 will take place as the armies of the world gather there to fight the final war of the ages. *Webster’s Dictionary* rightly defines Armageddon as “the final battle where good triumphs over evil.” In that valley that runs from Haifa in the north of Israel to below the Dead Sea, history will end in a blaze of fireworks. Though the book of Revelation describes it in gut-wrenching gore, it is a magnificent and triumphant spectacle for those of us who belong to Christ. Here’s the principle we learn in our final look at the Second Coming:

The final chapter of *His* Story makes the rest of the story worth living.

As the Middle East unraveled in 1981, President Reagan scribbled in his diary: "Got word of Israel bombing Iraqi nuclear reactor. I swear I believe Armageddon is near." As 2009 dawns, Israel and Hamas terrorists exchange deadly missile strikes, and Israeli troops mass to invade the Gaza Strip. Like Ronald Reagan, we might again wonder if Armageddon is near. But we don't need to fear. The baby, who was born in a manger, will come back as the Warrior King. In history's grand sweepstakes, we will be the biggest winners of all. An old saint once said to me, "My doctrine of the end times is pretty simple. I've read the last chapter of the Bible, and the good guys win." Maybe that's all we need to know. Let's look at those last chapters.

1. The Countdown to Armageddon

Armageddon appears by name only in Revelation 16:16: "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." Why would the nations of the world gather to fight in this tiny sliver of a country called Israel? There are the obvious reasons: 1) Israel is strategically located where Africa, Asia, and Europe converge; 2) It is joined at the hip to the most hated superpower on earth, the United States; 3) Those who control the oil reserves essential to the global economy want Israel eliminated. Militant Islam will not rest until Israel is destroyed.

But there is a deeper and more sinister reason why Israel will be the focal point of the final battle on earth. In Revelation 12 we see the *Red Dragon*: the fallen angel, Lucifer, once the most magnificent of all the archangels. In his pride he seduced one-third of the angels and tried to seize the throne of heaven. Revelation 12:7-9 tells us that he was defeated by the armies of the archangel Michael and cast down to earth with his demons. Verse nine says that, in his fury, Satan "leads the whole earth astray." Having failed in heaven, he now seduces the nations to rebel against God. This is the key to human history: anything or anyone God loves, Lucifer will try to destroy.

In Revelation 12:1 we see a beautiful woman. She is Israel, the daughter of Abraham and the bride of the King of heaven. Verses 4&5 say that she is about to birth a son, the Crown Prince of the Universe. According to verse four, he will one day rule all the nations with an iron scepter as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The dragon stalks the woman Israel to devour the boy before he grows up to destroy him. He inspires King Herod to try to kill the baby, and 31 years later engineers his crucifixion. But verse 5 says that the King of the Universe snatches the Crown Prince up to heaven. Verse 17 says that the dragon "was enraged at the woman." Revelation 12 paints a graphic picture of the *Red Dragon's* fury as he goes after Israel to destroy her.

From the time she was born 4,000 years ago, no nation has been attacked and destroyed more times than Israel. Almost every nation has persecuted the Jews who fled to it for refuge. From the ancient Pharaohs of Egypt to the pogroms of Medieval Europe to the engineers of the Nazi Holocaust, Israel has repeatedly been the victim of genocide. Even the Christian armies of the First Crusade butchered untold thousands of Jews as they marched from Europe to Jerusalem. Some historians have called this “the first holocaust.” On July 15, 1099 these Crusaders seized Jerusalem. During that day of unspeakable horror, they murdered every Muslim man, woman, and child in the city. Then these so-called *Christian* warriors proceeded to annihilate all 40,000 Jews in Jerusalem, locking them in their synagogues and burning them alive. What motivates this anti-Semite rage which still simmers in the world today? The answer is simple: an enraged dragon stalks the woman, and demonic forces seduce the nations to hate Israel.

But Revelation 12 is also a story of God’s preservation of his bride Israel. Twice she came back after she died—the only nation to ever do that. One of the greatest miracles in history took place on May 14, 1948 when Israel became a nation again almost 1900 years after Rome destroyed her. Why should we Christians care about Israel? Revelation 12:17 says that we are her offspring. She is our mother. Her father Abraham is our father. Her son, Christ, is our older brother. More than that, he is our Savior and King. Verse 17 says that “[The dragon] went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” As the spiritual children of Israel, we have a common enemy in the dragon. Our fate is inextricably tied to Israel’s future. I believe that God has blessed America because she has supported Israel. America will lose everything if she ever joins the other nations to turn against Israel.

The next seven chapters of Revelation tell of the final attempt by the *Red Dragon* to destroy Israel and her offspring. In the last days, he will raise up the Antichrist. This demigod will achieve the dream that has eluded all other conquerors and antichrists. Revelation 13:7 says, “He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation.” As we read the other Scriptures, a profile of this man emerges: charismatic and gifted, he will emerge during a time of great world crisis to form a one-world government. Endowed by Satanic power, he will initially solve global problems and even be worshipped as the savior of the world.

Revelation uses the same word coined by the prophet Daniel to describe this global union of nations: *the Beast*. Daniel says that it will be the

resurrection of the old Roman Empire; a dream as old as the first Babylon in Genesis 11 repeated in Revelation 13:7: one tribe, one people, one language, and one nation. I believe that it will come about because no single nation today can solve global ecological disasters, global economics, or global terrorism. Revelation 13:4 says, "Men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, 'Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?'" Such will be the power of this unholy trinity: Lucifer, the Antichrist, and the Beast.

But it will all unravel in the end as God intervenes to stop the madness. Revelation 14-17 records the three-and-half years of wrath he pours out on the earth. In chapter 18 the one-world government collapses and chaos reigns. In its rage, the unholy trinity gathers a host of nations to destroy Israel at a place called Armageddon. This insanity begs the question in Psalm 2:1&2: "Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One." As you watch for the signs of his coming, don't take your eyes off of Israel. She is the key to everything.

2. The Scope of Armageddon

Revelation 16:16 says that it will start at Megiddo in the north, just 18 miles from Haifa. St. John could not have known that one day Haifa would contain one of the greatest ports in the world, capable of handling the great armadas and armies that will come from the West. He also says in Revelation 13:16 that the River Euphrates will dry up, allowing the armies of the "kings of the east" to cross over it. It seemed impossible when St. John predicted this. But when Turkey built the Ataturk Dam in 1990, it stopped the flow of this mighty river for one month. With the flip of a switch it could be done again. In Revelation 19:16 St. John tells us that these armies from the east will number 200 million soldiers, the mega army of the ages. Think of the sheer possibilities with China, India, and Indonesia alone. Once these armies from the east cross the Euphrates River, they will travel south through Megiddo. But God said through an ancient Israeli prophet in Joel 3:2, "I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat." That valley is right outside of Jerusalem, part of the larger 200 mile-long valley that comes south from Megiddo. Isaiah 63:1 adds that the Messiah, robes stained with blood from battle, will come up from Edom which is modern day Jordan across from Jericho in the south of Israel. No wonder Ezekiel 38:16 says that the invading armies will cover the land, and Revelation 19:20 says that the blood will flow for 200 miles, the exact length of the valley which is Armageddon.

3. The trigger point of Armageddon

As the one-world coalition of nations disintegrates, the Antichrist will desperately try to hold things together. Daniel describes that frantic last days as the “man of peace” becomes a “man of war.” Daniel 11:44 says, “Reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out with great fury to annihilate many.” To the north is Russia and Iran. To the East is China, India, and the rest of Asia. To the west is Europe, his power base. He is furious because everything is unraveling. What alarms him? Is it the dried up Euphrates, and the 200 million man army that marches over it? Nobody knows what event will trigger that last great battle at Armageddon. Maybe it’s a fight for the oil fields of the Middle East. Perhaps old enmities resurface, or new alliances are being formed. But somehow they all unite at the last minute. Revelation 16:14 says, “There are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.” Though the world leaders have geopolitical reasons, Satan is pulling the strings in a last attempt to destroy God’s wife Israel. Or is it God Almighty who really pulls the dragon’s strings? Yes, God is orchestrating this thing because he is the One who, according to Psalm 2:4&5, “laughs and scoffs” at the kings who conspire against him, and “terrifies them in his wrath.”

4. The purpose of Armageddon

Why, in the words of Joel 3:2, does God “gather the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat”? What is the purpose of this horrific final battle? The Bible gives three reasons: 1) **At Armageddon God will finish his judgment of Israel.** Jeremiah 30:7 says this about the last battle: “How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.” Though Israel is God’s beloved, she is an adulterous wife. Worse than that, she has rejected her own Son, the Crown Prince. Her leaders engineered his crucifixion. For 2,000 years she has refused to recognize him as her Messiah. St. Paul said of the Jews in 2 Corinthians 3:14, “But their minds were made dull, and to this day their faces are veiled...” There are more atheists per capita in modern Israel than any other country in the world. The U.S. State Department lists Israel among the nations that most actively persecutes Christians. Modern Israel is a humanistic nation that depends on its technological expertise and military superiority. But God will break her in a day so terrible that she will have no other choice but to turn to the One she has rejected. In that day of “Jacob’s trouble” Jeremiah says that Israel will be saved. Zechariah 12:10 says, “They will look at me,

the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one who grieves for a firstborn son.”

2) At Armageddon God will pour out his final judgment on the nations who have persecuted Israel. Joel 3:2 says, “I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel.” The prophet Joel is crystal clear: God will handpick the nations that he gathers at Armageddon based on the way they have mistreated Israel over the years. This will be their day of reckoning; their public execution for their vicious anti-Semitism. I don’t know what nations will be there, but surely among them will be Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, Russia, Turkey, North Africa, and the nations of the Middle East where ancient Babylon, Assyria, Persia once tormented Israel, and where terrorists plot her destruction today.

3) At Armageddon God will pour out his judgment on a world that has rejected him. Revelation 19:15 says of Christ, “Out of his mouth will come a sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter.” I am fascinated by that next phrase in verse 15: “He treads the winepress of his fury.” When I see that word “fury” I think of Psalm 2 and “the kings that take their stand against the LORD and his Anointed One.” Psalm 2:3 says, “The One enthroned in heaven laughs...” But it’s Psalm 2:4 that’s so frightening: “Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath saying, ‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.’” Look at the tattoo on Christ’s thigh: “King of kings and Lord of lords.” This is the ultimate showdown at high noon; the day when old scores are settled; when man’s pride is smashed and Satan suffers his final humiliation. The angels cry out to the birds of the air in Revelation 19:17, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men...” Oh how the mighty have fallen!

5. Victory at Armageddon

It is here that we see the ultimate glorification of the Crown Prince who, after suffering humiliation and death for our salvation, returns as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Look at the glorious return of your Lord:

1) He is the Warrior King. Revelation 19:11 says, “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and true.” The humble servant who entered Jerusalem on a donkey now returns on a white war horse. St. John goes on: “With justice he judges and makes war.” When he first came, the angels sang, “Peace on earth, and

goodwill toward men..." Now there is no peace on earth and no goodwill toward those left on earth. Verse 12 says that "his eyes are like blazing fire..." Verse 13 says that his robe is drenched with the blood of those he has trampled in his fury at Armageddon. Verse 18 says that out of his mouth comes a sharp sword that slashes and strikes down the nations. He swings an iron rod with crushing blows. He stomps his enemies like someone crushing grapes in a winepress. This is a terrifying frenzy of wrath that has been pent up for millennia. This Jesus is awesome to behold. He demands our fear and utter awe. He is not to be trifled with, or ignored, or compromised. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords! Fall down before him, and give him your life while there is still time!

2) He comes with an army of saints and angels. Revelation 19:14 says, "The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." Who are these armies of heaven? Zechariah 14:5 says of that last day, "Then the Lord my God will come and all the holy ones with him." St. Paul repeats in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, "The Lord will come with his holy ones..." And Jude 14 says, "See the Lord is coming with thousands and thousands of his holy ones..." These are believers who have already been caught up and transformed to their glorious state. This means we will not be here for the second half of the tribulation. Angels will come with the saints. 2 Thessalonians 1:7 says that the Lord Jesus will be "revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels." How powerful are these angels? Revelation 20 says that it only takes a single angel to cast the dragon into the abyss.

3) Yet the victory is his alone. The armies of heaven are only along for the ride. These countless millions of glorified saints and millions of supernaturally-powerful angels in heaven's army could overwhelm the armies of the earth in both numbers and power. Yet they do nothing. Jesus alone, with the sword from his mouth and iron rod in his hand, destroys the nations of the world. Jesus is never dependent on us to do his work. He alone wins the battles. That's the way it will be on that final day, and the way it is on every day of our life. Fearful Christian, behold your King! Despairing believer, behold your King! Struggling brother and sister, behold your King! *His* story ends so perfectly. The hero on the white horse comes to save the day. The beautiful woman is rescued. All wrongs are righted. The beautiful woman is rescued. And we will all live happily ever after. That ought to keep you going through the next chapters of your life.

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