

(10) ARMAGEDDON: The Last Great Battle

People have various opinions as to how the world will end: A terrorist nuclear or biological attack; outbreaks of disease; asteroids smashing into the planet; religious extremists; social disintegration and ethnic cleansing; and over-population. However the Bible reveals that the end of the world as we know it takes place at the return of Jesus Christ. But in order to understand the Biblical truth about Christ's return, we must see it in the context of Revelation 20 - the Millennium or 1000 years. The 1000 years begins and ends with two resurrections - a resurrection of the righteous at the beginning and a resurrection of those who cling to sin, at the end (Revelation 20:5,6; John 5:28,29).

EVENTS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1000 YEARS

Jesus promised He would return to take those who accepted His offer of a forever friendship to be with him eternally (John 14:1-3). It's the same promise found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. At his Second Coming Jesus will gather all his forever friends to Himself - those who are alive and those who are raised to life. He will take them to his Father's House, which is in heaven ("Our Father who is in HEAVEN"). But sadly those who reject the only life support system - Jesus - will be destroyed at his return (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:11-21). There are no second chances after Christ's return for His friends.

Which brings us to the Battle of Armageddon. Many believe this battle will be fought on the plain of Jezreel near the ancient city of Megiddo. This Battle is mentioned under the 6th apocalyptic plague (Revelation 16:12-16). So just what is this battle all about? We have seen there are many symbols in the Apocalypse - the Dragon is Satan; the Lamb is the crucified Jesus; Israel is the church of Jews and non-Jews. The name Armageddon is also a symbol. Armageddon comes from two words - "Har" and "Megiddon." Har means mountain, and Megiddo means slaughter. Armageddon is thus, "the Mountain of Slaughter." Megiddo was a small city on a hill overlooking the Plain of Jezreel. So important was this strategically located city during ancient times that the Egyptians even occupied it. In Biblical history important battles took place on this plain below Megiddo, in which God fought for His people by slaughtering their enemies in order to deliver them from evil powers. For example on this plain, through God's power, Gideon with just 300 men defeated an enormous army of thousands of Midianites. Also Megiddo is at the end of the Carmel ranges on which Elijah had a showdown with the prophets of Baal as to who was the God of Israel. When Jehovah God sent fire to consume his sacrifice, all Israel

recognized Jehovah was God and Baal an impotent fraud. It was then that Elijah had the prophets of Baal slaughtered at the bottom of Mt Carmel on the edge of the Jezreel plain.

So, will Armageddon be a literal battle fought out on the plain of Jezreel near the city of Megiddo between the armies of all the nations on earth? There is no way the armies of all the nations would ever fit into this relatively small plain. The Bible says this great battle is firstly "God's battle" not "man's battle" (Revelation 16:14,16). It is God's battle with end-time evil and the 3 evil powers behind it all. A battle which John saw takes place when Jesus comes as King of Kings and Lord of Lords under the symbol of a rider on a white horse (Revelation 19:11,16,19,20). It is God's justice meted out on end-time evil. A battle follows, which climaxes with the collapse and destruction of the Babylonian trio, consisting of the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet, through the mightiest earthquake ever to rock the planet (Revelation 16:17-21). This is the same earthquake described earlier in the Apocalypse which occurs at the time of the return of Christ (Revelation 6:12-17). Armageddon is thus God's battle against the end-time evil powers and their followers at the second coming of Jesus. The battle is that part of the second coming of Jesus which puts evil to a forever end.

EVENTS DURING THE 1000 YEARS

Let's examine the events that take place during the 1000 years. After those who rejected God's plea and offer for a friendship cease to live when Jesus comes, the Bible says Satan is bound for 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-3). For 1000 years, Satan is chained, surrounded by the evidence of his own insane rebellion, left to contemplate the tragic choices that resulted in this mayhem and cataclysm. Earth is destroyed! But in what way is Satan chained? Is it by some sort of literal chain? No! In the days of Jesus, a demon possessed man who had been chained up broke his chains as if they were made of cotton. No! Satan is chained by the circumstances of his rebellion. Jesus said Satan's whole aim since his fall is to deceive and destroy (John 8:44). For 1000 years Satan has no one to deceive and destroy! All God's forever friends have been taken to heaven, and all those who rejected God's grace and cling to sin have been destroyed. This binds Satan.

And what or where is this Abyss or bottomless pit in which he is chained? The Greek word Abyss which is translated "bottomless pit" (or the deep) in some translations, is the same word used for the earth in a chaotic condition - the earth in its original state, without form, void and filled with darkness was called an Abyss (Genesis 1:1,2). Jeremiah said the

same when he prophesied that God was about to use the Babylonians to bring judgment on Israel because of their rebellion. The land of Israel would become a chaotic wasteland (Jeremiah 4:23). The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the same word as the Apocalypse (Abyss) for the land of Israel after the Babylonians were to pass through it with their armies.

During the 1000 years while Christ's friends are in His Father's house in heaven, they participate in a judgment process (Revelation 20:4-6). Which is exactly what Paul was describing when he wrote to his friends in the city of Corinth (1 Corinthians 6:2,3). Clearly the Scriptures describe a very specific task of judgment that will come to God's friends during this 1000-year reign with Jesus in heaven.

But someone says – "I thought judgment had already taken place. How could God bring anybody home if He hadn't already made a decision about who was coming and who wasn't?" You're right. The prophecies of Daniel 7, 8 and 9, along with the scriptural teaching about the judgment of the human race, which we shared in a previous program, indicate that the great heavenly judgement is completed before the second coming of Christ. So why a judgment during the 1000 years? Because the Apocalypse reveals that the bottom line of judgment is about God's creatures understanding the sort of God who runs this universe (Revelation 15:3,4). You can be certain that there will be some very serious questions some people will ask. Husbands will look for wives and not find them there...and wives for the husbands ...and parents for their children...and children for their parents...BUT THEY WILL NOT BE FOUND. Imagine the questions about God that will race through people's minds - Why? Why didn't you save her, why didn't you save him? You promised you would save them. Why? And with His arm around that troubled heart, God will quietly walk to the archives...and replay the record of their life...and when the story is over He will ask – Did I do the right thing? Did I honour what he really wanted in this life? Did I respect her freedom to say no? Do you still see that I loved him to the end? It's no wonder that it is only after the millennium that the Bible declares that **GOD WILL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS**. Think of it 1000 years living next door to God. That's why He's planned it. Side by side, heart to heart, to help us with the deepest questions of our human hearts.

EVENTS AT THE END OF THE 1000 YEARS

At the end of the millennium Satan is released (Revelation 20:7). In what way is he unchained? Because he now has someone to work on – to deceive and destroy (Revelation 20:8). Billions of people from the nations now become the target of his diabolical deceptions. But where did these people come from? I thought you said a moment ago that all those who reject God's offer of a forever friendship would be destroyed at Christ's Second Coming? A good question! We must go back to John's Apocalyptic vision of the millennium in which he sees

the resurrection to life of those who rejected the offer of God's Forever Friendship – *"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The REST OF THE DEAD DID NOT COME TO LIFE UNTIL THE THOUSAND YEARS WERE ENDED). This is the FIRST RESURRECTION. BLESSED AND HOLY are those who have part in the FIRST RESURRECTION. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years"* (Revelation 20:4-6). Notice that there are two resurrections mentioned here: 1. The first resurrection at the beginning of the 1000 years is for the BLESSED AND HOLY OR THE GOOD - the forever friends of Jesus are raised to life and taken to Heaven Jesus' second coming; 2. The second resurrection for the REST OF THE DEAD OR THE EVIL PEOPLE takes place at the end of the 1000 years. Which is exactly what Jesus had promised – *"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the RESURRECTION OF LIFE, and those who have done evil, to the RESURRECTION OF CONDEMNATION"* (John 5:28,29). Every human who has ever died will come forth in one of two resurrections – Those who chose a FOREVER FRIENDSHIP with God will arise at the second coming of Jesus, while those who chose Lucifer's lordship instead, will arise at the end of the millennium.

Satan is released at the end of the 1000 years when those who rejected the offer of God's forever friendship are raised to life. He then deceives these rejecters of God's grace into thinking they can take God's City – the camp of His friends – which will come to this earth (Revelation 20:8,9; 21:2). So there we have it: Two camps – God and His forever friends within the city, and the majority of people, who rejected His offer of the same forever friendship, outside the city. Look, says Satan, "We far outnumber all those inside God's New Jerusalem. We can take it! Let's go!" Thus he deceives his followers into attacking God's New Jerusalem home on earth.

But why does God raise to life those who have rejected His offer of a forever friendship, only to destroy them with fire from heaven? The answer is found in what occurs just before the forces of evil under Satan are destroyed by fire from heaven. God holds His final session of Judgment (Revelation 20:11-13). What a unique time in earth's history! For now all who have ever lived on planet earth are gathered together at this one time before God - His friends inside the city with Him, and those who have rejected His grace are outside the city. Raising the rejecters of His grace to life again is the only way God can honour their free choice and at the same time

make it evident to any who might wonder in the end if perhaps they have changed their minds. God seated on His throne, opens the books of record of the lives of those who rejected Him and His grace – He replays their stories that they and everyone can see that it is by their choice they are outside. God replays everyone's story so all can clearly understand why they must be destroyed forever. When God is finished, the Scriptures declare that everyone in the entire universe, including Satan and those who cling to sin, not only clearly sees God's justice, truthfulness and holiness, but fears, glorify and worships God (Revelation 15:3,4; Philippians 2:10,11). Imagine it, every man, woman, young adult and child who accepted or rejected God's offer of a forever friendship will then confess that in fact God was love all the way through their lives, and that Jesus is the only Lord of all. "God is loving and just," will be the cry from both the saved inside and the lost outside.

Finally we come to the most tragic moment in our story! Satan and his followers are destroyed forever by fire. Though acknowledging God's love and justice, the forces of evil and their followers do not change their attitude of rebellion toward God. Satan continues his move to storm God's city, and in that instant, all hell breaks loose – and for a span of time there will be hell on earth (Revelation 20:9,14,15). It is obvious a trillion years would not change Satan and his follower's rebellion toward the God of love. And so out of love for them and respecting their choice, God lets the fire fall. This is the final and tragic chapter to God's passionate commitment to human freedom. The dragon, the inspiration of Babylon, is now also destroyed. The Terminator is forever terminated. But there is also glorious good news. The earth will be renewed for eternity. The fire that descends from the heavens cleanses the earth and melts the last broken horizon of sin. Hell Fire is NOT a forever fire. Which is what the very next words in the apocalypse describe after the fire has done its work - a new creation on this very same planet where the cleansing fires fell (Revelation 21:1).

Will this whole terrible nightmare of sin and its tragic consequences ever surface again?" No, God's word PROMISES. Sin and its consequences will be eradicated forever (Revelation 21:4). God CAN'T LIE. But the real reasons sin will not occur again is firstly because of God's judgment process before, after and during the 1000 years. His justice has been REVEALED AND ACKNOWLEDGED by all, including Satan and his followers. But the primary reason it will never rise again is Calvary. Forever the scars of Jesus remain on His hands and feet and side, quietly telling the eternal truth - GOD IS LOVE.

At the end of the 1000 years all humanity will be assembled at the same time: Some inside, safe in God's city of love because they accepted His grace, but tragically most will be outside looking in, wishing they had made the right choice and accepted God's offer when His Spirit pleaded with them to let Him be their very best friend. Now is the time to accept God's

offer of a FOREVER HOME with Him. Won't you accept and follow Him unreservedly right now?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS - *This resume has drawn considerably from Dwight Nelson's, "The Next Millennium Seminar" 1998*