

7. THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

This great battle will be a gathering of armies representing the nations of the whole world who go to fight against Jerusalem.

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?
The world leaders prepare for war and the rulers band together
against the Lord and his anointed king, saying:
Let us break their chains and throw off their ropes (Ps 2:1-3).

They will be anti-Christian, anti-Israeli, anti-God forces gathering to fight against Jerusalem at the instigation of Satan (Rev 16:13-14). Great numbers from the East and North (Gog and his hordes) will come to fight in Israel at a battlefield called Armageddon. But godless arrogant mankind will be slaughtered.

Zechariah prophesies a siege made against Jerusalem and Judah by all the nations on Earth and says that these armies will end up attacking one another. The Lord will make Jerusalem an immovable rock and a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Everyone who burdens themselves with it will be crushed. He will strike every horse with panic and every rider with madness. He will keep his eyes on the Judah but will blind every horse of the invading armies. He will seek to destroy all of the nations who come against Jerusalem (Zech 12:2-4, 9). The horse is made ready for the day of battle (Prov 21:31), it is a metaphor for warfare. In these prophecies about the last days, we need to think about tanks, missiles, drones, and bombs.

Jerusalem will be captured, the houses ransacked, the women raped, and half of the city will go into exile, but the remaining people will not be cut off from the city (Zech 14:2). The Lord will inflict all those who attack Jerusalem with a plague. He'll cause their flesh to rot away, even while they're standing on their feet. He will cause their eyes to rot away in their sockets, and their tongues to rot away in their mouths.

They will be stricken with a terrible panic from the Lord, and they'll attack each other. It is a day of judgment by God on the nations, but man is responsible for the nuclear contamination and slaughter.

Joel 2:2-5 Joel sees a vision of the Day of the Lord, twenty-first-century nuclear warfare! He sees a day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and darkness, and a great and powerful army spreading over the mountains. Never has there been anything like it and there never will be again. Fire devours before them, and behind them, a conflagration rages. Before they come, the land is like the garden in Eden. After they leave, there is only a barren wasteland, and nothing escapes them. They look like horses and move very fast. They leap over the mountains and rumble like chariots. They are like the roar of a wildfire that devours the chaff, like an army drawn up for battle.

This great army has similarities to a swarm of locusts, but it is a great army of tanks and modern weapons of warfare. Joel continues telling us about the Day of the Lord. The Lord will display warnings in the heavens, and on the Earth blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will darken, and the moon will turn red like blood, before the coming of the great and terrifying Day of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. True at Pentecost, and also for the Jews in the last days. Joel is primarily about the Day of the Lord. It is on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem that there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord calls (Joel 2:32). The ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy is Israel's salvation on the Day of the Lord.

In those very days and at that time, when the Lord restores prosperity to Judah and Jerusalem, he will gather all nations, bringing them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. He will set out his case against them there, on behalf of his people Israel, because they scattered them among the nations and apportioned his land among themselves (Joel 2:30 – 3:2).

This is Armageddon! Joel continues his description of the judgment of the nations, which terminates in the coming of the Lord and victory for his people. God will sit and judge all the surrounding nations.

Their wickedness is so great! Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come and trample the grapes for the winepress is full and the vats overflow. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of judgment, for the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of

jufgment. The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem, and the Earth and the heavens will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for Israel. Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be mine, foreigners will never invade her again (Joel 3:13-17).

Mankind will initiate the action, but it is as if the Lord is calling all the nations to gather their armies and come to Israel for a time of judgment. After the sixth angel pours out his bowl of wrath on the great river Euphrates, the way will be prepared for the kings of the East to cross that barrier and head for Israel. The apostle John saw unclean spirits coming out of the mouths of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet, a trinity of evil. They will go and gather the kings of the whole world for the battle of the great day of God Almighty. They will gather at a battleground that in Hebrew is called Armageddon (Rev 16:12-16).

Ezekiel 38:8-9 describes this same invasion of Israel in the last days by an international leader called Gog of the land of Magog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. After many days, he will be called to arms (by God). In future years he will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had lain desolate. They were brought out from the nations and now live in safety. Gog and his troops and many nations with him will go up, advancing like a storm. They will be like a cloud covering the land.

This coalition of nations will come from the far North and the East - Iran, Sudan and Libya will be with him, and maybe former Soviet Union countries which are mostly Turkic and Muslim. Revelation 19:11-21 describes Armageddon symbolically. Horses, eyes like blazing fire, crown, robe, fine linen, sword, iron rod, winepress, supper, beast, and fiery lake of burning sulfur are all words and phrases from the OT that are used metaphorically. The OT prophecies give more literal descriptions.

In his final vision, the prophet Daniel describes Armageddon, which he calls a great war:

At the time of the end the king of the South (Egypt) will engage him (Antichrist) in battle, and the king of the North (Turkey-

Syria-Iraq) will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He (Antichrist) will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. ... But reports from the East and the North (Gog) will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. There he'll come to his end, and no one will help him (Dan 11:40-45).

The apostle Peter describes the Day of the Lord as a time of worldwide destruction, and also the day of the Messiah's return. The time will arrive unexpectedly, like a thief for unbelievers, but not to the faithful (1 Thess 5:4). The sky will be set ablaze and pass away with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the Earth and everything done on it will be laid bare. But it is not the end of the world. According to God's promise, he said, we are waiting for a renewed heaven and Earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:10, 12b-13).

This is in harmony with Jesus' prophecy that immediately after the troubles of those days, the sun will darken, the moon won't give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. The Messiah's sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land (Israel) will mourn when they see him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He'll send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they'll gather his elect (the Church) from all countries, from one end of the Earth to the other (Mt 24:29-31). The Day of the Lord is not the end of the world, as shown by Jesus' words when he said that if God had not cut short those days, no one would survive. For the sake of the elect, the days will be shortened (Mt 24:22) and people will survive. It will be a time of massive destruction and the words Peter uses are indicative of nuclear warfare. How could a first-century writer be expected to describe the phenomena of our atomic age? Much of the destruction described in Revelation is caused by man and one purpose of God's wrath is to destroy those who are in the process of destroying the Earth (Rev 11:18).

When thinking about the final days and months before the Lord's coming, we should not forget the emphasis the Scripture lays on the destruction by fire. After the blowing of the first four trumpets, one-third of the Earth is burned by fire; trees, grass, seas, and rivers are all affected. At that time the sun, moon, and stars are blotted out by smoke. Noah's Earth was destroyed by a global flood, and afterward,

it was regenerated. The present Earth is reserved for fire when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed (2 Pet 3:8), and then it will also be regenerated by the Messiah. Much of the destruction and massacre will be caused by nuclear warfare and nuclear contamination.

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord will come with fire, and his chariot will be like a whirlwind, to pay back his anger in fury and flames of fire. For with fire and sword *the Lord will judge all humanity*, and those slain will be *many* (Isa 66:15-16). This is an enormous slaughter; one-third of mankind will be killed by fire, smoke, and sulfur (Rev 9:15, 18). This is *the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men* (2 Pet 3:7).

Peter tells his readers to look forward to and hasten the coming day of God because it is the day that the Messiah will come and establish his worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness. There will be new heavens and a new Earth in keeping with his promise through Isaiah, an Earth that will be fully restored by the Messiah who created the world. The following prophecies all speak of great destruction at the end of the age related to the battle of Armageddon. Some of them describe a restoration of the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, others the return of the Messiah (Isa 13:9-13, 34:1-4, 8, Joel 2:1-11, 30-32, 3:1-2, 12-16, Zeph 1:14 – 2:3, Hag 2:6-7, Mt 24:29-30, Lk 21:25-27, 2 Pet 3:10-13, Rev 6:12-17, 9:13-16, 16:12-21).

Many of these passages describe the destruction and judgment as the Day of the Lord. Some of them refer to the nations and their armies who fight against the Lord. And the climax comes when the Lord descends to fight against them. Many passages talk about earthquakes and cosmic disturbances: the darkening of the sun and moon, stars falling from the sky, or being dissolved, the sky being shaken or rolled up, or disappearing. This judgment on the nations at the Lord's return should not be confused with the last judgment when the wicked will be judged as individuals for what they have done, and the Earth and the heavens will flee from his presence and no place will be found for them. That occurs after the millennium.

Paul describes the judgment on evildoers at the Lord's return (2 Thess 1:5-10) when he is writing to encourage the persecuted Thessalonian believers. He says it is right that God pays back those who are afflicting them. The believers will get relief when the Messiah comes from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire to take revenge on those who don't know God and refuse to obey the gospel, including

their persecutors. When the Lord descends with blazing fire, it is a judgment day scenario, it is Armageddon when he comes to defeat his enemies who have surrounded Jerusalem and who have been mercilessly persecuting his people. The leaders of the rebellion, the Antichrist and the False Prophet are immediately cast into hell to suffer eternal destruction. It is also a day of judgment in favor of the righteous, who will be resurrected and raptured to be with the Lord. And it is a judgment in favor of Israel who will be converted soon after this time and shown to be God's chosen nation.

Revelation 20 tells of a thousand-year period that follows the Messiah's return, in which Satan will be bound so that he cannot influence those living on the Earth while the Messiah reigns with the resurrected saints. After the millennial rule, Satan is defeated once and for all, the Earth and heaven pass away, and the wicked are resurrected and judged according to what they have done. As their names are not in the Lamb's Book of Life, they are thrown into the lake of fire, a metaphor for hell (Rev 20:15). That is the last judgment, which should not be confused with the judgment of the nations on the Day of the Lord.