

7

The Antichrist & The Battle Of Armageddon

Antichrist revealed – The Tribulation starts

As I have discussed in previous chapters the Tribulation starts after the Rapture, where Christ comes and takes His church from earth to be with Him in heaven. The Bible teaches that this present age, the Church Age that started at Pentecost nearly 2000 years ago, will end with the Rapture, followed by the seven year Tribulation period, which will end with the Second Coming of Christ to earth.

This warning bears repeating once again regarding the tribulation of the end days and if He did not intervene, Christ said that, "*Unless those days be shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's (believers) sake those days will be shortened (Matt. 24:22).*" Just prior to this statement Jesus said, "*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be (v.21).*" This prophecy could not have been fulfilled by any previous persecutions on humanity because it is clearly stated that it will be ended by the Second Coming of Christ. Adding up the numbers in the book of Revelation, we are looking at over one half of the world's population, some 4 billion will die. As I stated previously, I truly believe that the Rapture (church taken heaven) will take place in less than 16 years. This is how close we are to the Tribulation when God's wrath will be poured out upon the unbelieving inhabitants of earth, then ending with Christ's return to earth.

There never has been a time like this and there never will be another calamity like the Tribulation. It will be the greatest period of suffering

the world has ever known. It will be the ultimate "future shock." The Old Testament prophets mentioned it at least 49 times, and its mentioned at least 15 times in the New Testament. The Bible teaches that the Tribulation (the seven year, 70th week of Daniel) is a time of preparation for Israel's restoration and conversion. It is referred to in Scripture as *"the time of Jacob's distress (Jeremiah 30:7)."*

Think! Except for these end times, when has mankind held the capacity to destroy all flesh? Never! It's only been since World War II and specifically in the last 60 years with the advent of modern nuclear, chemical and now "radiological" weapons could this be possible. We live in an age when all of these are available. Nuclear weapons alone possess the capability, with the stockpiles that currently exist, to wipe out all mankind many times over. Here's an example of what I read the other day: "Just three of these thermal nuclear warheads have enough force to literally flatten the state of New York and 20 would kill every living thing from the southern tip of Florida to northern coast of Maine. Casualty rate for all living things are 100% for 250,000 years." Yet, Christ predicted this nearly 2000 years ago.

Let me make this clear to everyone as there is some confusion amongst churches. Christ's body of believers, the Church, will not be present on earth during the Antichrist's reign in the Tribulation. This is confirmed by the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians and by John in the book of Revelation. John records Christ's words: *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth (Rev. 3:10)."* You see, if you know the Lord, there is no need to worry because Christ said, *"For God did not appoint us to wrath.... Therefore comfort each other (1 Thess. 5:9, 11)."* It is no coincidence that the gospel was preached around the world precisely at the time when weapons of mass destruction became available, proving correct the timing of Christ's warning about the danger to the survival of all humanity.

The purpose of the Tribulation

While there are actually several purposes, I'd like to focus on just one: God will use the Tribulation to force man to choose between Him or the Antichrist. The events of the Tribulation are intended to give all people a very clear opportunity to either follow God or follow the

Antichrist. For thousands of years, God has given people the choice of worshiping Him voluntarily or rejecting Him. And there is coming a day when God will take the world back as His own and set up His everlasting rule upon it. But before doing so, He will give everyone around the globe one last opportunity to accept or reject Him. The Tribulation will make it clear that there is no middle ground; no one can sit on the fence when it comes to their status with God. While the Tribulation is primarily a time of judgement and punishment, God will go all out in His efforts to draw people to Himself using 144,000 evangelists.

Who are the 144,000 Israelites mentioned in Revelation?

During the Tribulation, God will send His two witnesses into the world to prophesy and perform mighty miracles. There will also be 144,000 Israelites "*sealed*" for God's service during this period (Rev. 7:4). The 144,000 Israelites will become evangelists and there shall be a great harvest of souls during these terrible tribulation days. It is hard to imagine the impact these 144,000 spirit filled Jews might have on the world. Their power from the Holy Spirit enables them to have great courage and bravery as they give witness to God's Word and testify to salvation in Christ Jesus. Imagine the magnitude of the revival that will take place during the Tribulation. They are 144,000 of all the 12 tribes of the children of Israel. In the seventh chapter of Revelation, the Holy Spirit gives the names of the tribes in order to avoid confusion. There are 12,000 from each tribe. They will be preserved, sealed and protected by God so that they cannot be killed by the Antichrist while they complete their service to God. People will hear their message and many will be saved. This is further confirmation that there will be many new believers during this time. And, just as in the early days of the faith after Christ's resurrection, many will be martyred because of their belief.

The two witnesses of the Tribulation

Who are the two witnesses spoken of in the book of Revelation that will preach the gospel during the Tribulation? The Bible doesn't specify who these two witnesses are but I believe they are Enoch and Elijah, the two prophets that didn't die but were taken up to heaven without experiencing physical death. I believe that God took these two men up to heaven in order that He might send them back to earth to

witness for Him for 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation. In the book of Genesis, Moses sent plagues against Egypt and here in the book of Revelation we also see these two witnesses sending plagues to the unbelieving world and antagonizing the Antichrist.

The two witnesses will be given incredible power by God. He says, *"I will grant authority to my two witnesses... These have the power to shut up the sky, so the rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire (Rev. 11:3, 6)."* Apparently the two witnesses are the human instruments God will use to call forth the 10 terrible plagues of Egypt as in the days of Moses.

God's last two witnesses (prophets) will have power to turn the waters into blood and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they desire. Besides being able to smite their enemies with fire, these two prophets will have power over the rain. In 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1-2 you can read where Elijah stopped the rain for 3 Years in King Ahab's time. The same thing will happen again during the Tribulation. For 3 1/2 years there will be no rain on planet earth. Men will be scorched with heat (Rev. 16:9). These will be the days when God punishes this world for rejecting His Son. It will be a time of hell and misery like the world has never seen before.

Scripture tells us that the Antichrist is allowed to kill these two witnesses after they finish their testimony and their preaching of 3 1/2 years (Rev. 11:7). Scripture goes on to say that, *"the whole world will rejoice over their death because these two prophets tormented those who dwelt on the earth, and the entire world will be able to see their bodies for 3 1/2 days as they lie unburied on the streets of Jerusalem (Rev. 11:7-10)."* The two witnesses are so hated that the entire world will rejoice at their deaths sending gifts to one another (v.10). Their enemies will be ecstatic that someone has finally put an end to these two nemeses.

Their bodies will be put on public display and viewed via satellite around the world. Their bodies will lie in the street for 3 1/2 days, sweltering in the sun. Their bodies are already decomposing, and the next action we see is that they stand up; a frightening sight for the people on earth. The whole world will see this because they are

looking in on the scene via a live broadcast (probably CNN). While they are the focus of world attention, they are not only resurrected, but they are raptured straight to heaven in a cloud. This scene is vividly described in Revelation: *"Now after 3 1/2 days the breath of life (spirit) from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who were watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them (Rev. 11-12)."*

Think! Now, how can this scene be possible when this was written over 1900 years ago? Well, naturally it will have to be by television. You see, the Bible spoke of television 1900 years ago before man had even invented it. Television has made this passage of Scripture real and possible. You see, only God knows the future and why prophecy is 100% accurate. Now, through the medium of satellites circling the globe it's possible to transmit live pictures and voices to anyplace in the world instantaneously.

Who is the Antichrist – the end time ruler?

I believe that there will be a meltdown of political and economic systems within the next 16 years before the Rapture, everything so chaotic that it will set the stage for a super person embodied by the Antichrist to come on the world scene. A totalitarian system – authoritarian rule. According to Scripture he will have the answers for today's problems and people will follow him. The Antichrist will be a charismatic leader who will be able to sway the masses with his speaking ability (Daniel 7:8). Also verified in the book of Revelation: *"And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies (v.13:5)."* The Antichrist will be noted in his career for wonderful eloquence, and will be able to capture the attention and admiration of the world. Because of his ability as an orator, he will stand in front of the world's people and galvanize them into a mighty force. With his great magnetic personality, intellect, cleverness and his uncommon wisdom, this man will cause people to flock to him.

The combination of magnetic personality, speaking ability, and extreme good looks will make him virtually irresistible to the masses. When he comes on the scene, people will flock to him like flies to honey, and they will fall over themselves to do anything he asks. The Antichrist will aggressively live up to his terrible name. He will be

Satan's superman, who persecutes, and kills the people of God and leads the armies of the world into the climatic battle of Armageddon. He will be the most powerful dictator the world has ever seen, making Caesar, Hitler, Mao and Saddam seem weak and tame by comparison.

The Antichrist is represented as a Beast; an appropriate title for him (Rev. 13:1-18). During the last 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will personify Satan himself. We read in 2 Thessalonians 2:9: *"The coming of the lawless one is according to the works of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders."*

His rise to power is inconspicuous. He will not be noticed in the beginning, and will hardly raise the attention even of those who are closest to the centre of action. He will rise out of the masses (Rev. 13:1). Whatever power the Antichrist has, he only has it by virtue of the fact that he is allowed to have it by Almighty God. As bad as the Tribulation is, it is never out of God's control. There is a leash on Satan, and God is holding on to the other end of the leash. Satan will be able to do only that which God allows him to do in the consummation of the end of the age.

According to Revelation 13:8: *"All who dwell on the earth will worship him."* Daniel 7:25 tells us that the Antichrist is a cultic leader: *"He shall speak pompous words against God... And shall intend to change the times and law."* He will speak out against the true God of heaven. The language suggests that he will try to raise himself to the level of God and make declarations from that position.

Second Thessalonians 2:4 says of the Antichrist, *"Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."* He will accept the worship of the people of the world. The Antichrist is all about putting together man's last fling at ruling the world.

Because of the 144,000 Israeli evangelists and God's two witnesses there will be followers of Christ on earth when the Antichrist is here, and Scripture says they will be persecuted. They will be martyred for their faith. The program of the Antichrist will be one of property seizure, economic squeeze, mark of the Beast, torture, and murder. Regarding the mark of the Beast, Revelation 13:16-17 says, *"He*

causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark of the name of the Beast, or the number of his name." Those who refused to receive the mark of the Beast will suffer the wrath of the Antichrist. But Revelation 14:9-11 warns that all who receive the mark of the Beast will suffer eternal judgement at the hand of God. The torment of those who worship the Beast will last forever.

The mark of the Beast indicates that the one wearing it is a worshiper of the Beast and submits to his rule. To be without the mark is to be labelled a traitor. The people who do not have the mark will be killed, or starved simply because they will not be able to get the food and other things they need to stay alive (Revelation. 13:15).

Conflict of the ages

The world today stands on the brink of a great calamity. The doom of the economic and political systems is inevitable. Already nations are looking for a world leader or superman that will be able to bring order out of chaos, peace out of war and security in the midst of insecurity.

Strange as it may appear, this struggle between good and evil began in heaven but it will end up on the earth. It began between God and Satan. When Satan could not prevail in heaven but was cast down to earth, his next attack was against Adam and Eve, our first parents. By their disobedience sin entered into the world and it might seem as though Satan won the second round. But let us not forget that God foretold that *ONE* would come born of a virgin who would bring final defeat to Satan: *"And I will put enmity (division) between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15)."* The battle is to be fought to a definite conclusion and won by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me explain: God predicts the perpetual hostility between Satan and the woman (representing all mankind), and between Satan's seed (his agents or demons) and her Seed (the Messiah). The woman's Seed would crush the devil's head, a mortal wound spelling utter defeat. This wound was administered at Calvary when the Saviour decisively triumphed over the devil. Satan, in turn, would bruise the Messiah's heel. The heel wound here speaks of suffering and even of physical

death, but not of ultimate death. So, Christ suffered on the cross and even died, but He rose from the dead; victorious over sin, hell, and Satan. The fact that He is called the woman's Seed suggests His virgin birth.

All through 6000 years of human history there were times when it seemed that Satan would conquer. But again and again Satan's seeming victory ended in defeat, and time is now running out for Satan and his hordes. He wants to fight, and until Christ returns to crush his head he will continue to wage war. Armageddon speaks of universal rebellion against God. It is the moment when the world's cup of inequity is full. The time is coming when all nations shall have to give an account of themselves before God, and His judgement shall be poured out upon them. The campaign of Armageddon will bring to a climax the whole work of Satan. He will bring to fruition the whole design of Satan and will seek to destroy God's plan for the world and for His people. The battle of Armageddon will culminate with Satan's defeat and the ushering in of Christ's reign on earth for 1000 years (Millennium).

Armageddon

The word "Armageddon" is used in modern cultures to describe doomsday type events or even a "meeting with the boss." Many people may not know it is the biblical name for earth's final great battle when Israel is saved from annihilation and the rebellious nations of earth are defeated.

The Bible says there is going to be a final war one day on this earth. That war, called Armageddon, will signal the coming down of the curtain on modern civilization. Preparations for that war are underway in our world at this very moment. The only thing blocking the players in that war from moving on to the stage of battle is the Rapture; the transfer of the Church of Jesus Christ to heaven. Following that event, the final war, the battle of Armageddon will take place at the end of the Tribulation period.

The battle of Armageddon begins in heaven and descends to earth with the casting out of Satan (Rev. 12:7-13). Satan is the "*prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2)*." His dominion is the heavenly region surrounding planet earth. In the middle of the seven year Tribulation, he will be cast out of that domain to earth where he will begin to

persecute *"the woman who gave birth to the male Child (Rev. 12:13)."* The *"woman"* is not Mary, Jesus's mother, but Israel; the one through whom Jesus Christ came into this world. Satan's goal will be to destroy Israel before the return of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth.

Satan will have two human helpers: the Beast (the Antichrist) and the False Prophet (Rev. 16:13). These three form an unholy trinity of persecution against God's chosen people during the Tribulation. It is that reign of terror against Israel that will lead the world to the battle of Armageddon.

The Perspective of the Battle of Armageddon

Let's reset the stage for this end time configuration: The Church of Jesus Christ is taken to heaven which marks the beginning of the seven year Tribulation period. The ruler of the European nations, the Antichrist, makes a peace treaty with Israel ensuring her safety from the surrounding Arab nations; a time when Israel is living in *"unwalled villages (Ezek. 38:11)."* During this time a coalition of nations from *"the North"* (Russia, Iran and others) attack Israel but are stopped and defeated by God. Ezekiel calls this the **"battle of Gog and Magog"** (Chapter.38). This is not the battle of Armageddon. These two battles need to be kept separate. One occurs right after the Rapture when Russia and her allies attacks Israel and the other occurs at the end of the seven year Tribulation when Christ comes back to earth to do battle with the Antichrist and the nations.

Armageddon – the great battle that never was

In the battle of Armageddon, the leaders of the world, headed by the Antichrist, will gather their great armies from the East and the West and assemble to strike a final blow against Israel. Through the ages, Satan has wanted to destroy Israel because he has wanted to prevent Gods promises from being fulfilled through His chosen people; Israel. Satan has never succeeded, and in the battle of Armageddon, he will make one last attempt which will be thwarted by none other than Christ Himself. This final great war of history is prophesied to be the most catastrophic and devastating occurrence in human history. As Satan and his armies move on Jerusalem, God will intervene and Jesus Christ will return to rescue His people; Israel. Christ and His angelic

army will destroy the armies, capture the Antichrist and False Prophet and cast them into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:19-20).

In a sense, Armageddon is a battle that never really takes place. That is, it does not take place in accordance with its human intent to gather the armies of the world to execute the Antichrist's solution to the "Jewish problem." This is why Jesus Christ chooses this moment in history for His return to earth. He will thwart the Antichrist's attempted annihilation of the Jews and destroy the armies of the world who have been gathered for that purpose. It seems only fitting, in light of mankind's bloody legacy, that the return of Christ should be precipitated by worldwide military conflict against Israel. History is moving towards Armageddon.

How do current events in the Middle East relate to Armageddon?

Current events in the Middle East do not relate directly to the next prophetic event in God's calendar; the Rapture. However, they do relate, prophetically, to the next phase of history, which is the Tribulation. Since the seven year Tribulation will climax in the battle of Armageddon and the Middle East, then events occurring today are preparatory for the Tribulation and can be tracked as setting the stage for the future. Let me explain: The world today is like a stage being set for a great drama. The major actors are already in the wings waiting for their moment in history. The main stage props are already in place. The prophetic play is about to begin. All the necessary historical developments have already taken place.

These major situations that are true now, but were not true 60 years ago, point to the conclusion that the Rapture itself may be very near because the stage has been set for events that will follow the Rapture. All areas of prophecy combine in the united testimony that history is preparing the generation born after 1967 for the end of the age. In each area of prophecy a chronological checklist of important prophetic events can be compiled. In each list, in regards to the Church, the nations, or Israel, the events of history clearly indicate that the world is poised, ready for the Rapture and the beginning of the countdown to Armageddon.

Why should I be concerned about Armageddon?

God has told us some of the future through biblical prophecy. We do not know the future fully, but we know with certainty that God is presently working in the lives of people and events each day. Through past and present events, God is working to set the stage for the final act of world history. It is an act in which Jesus Christ will reign supreme, and Armageddon is one scene in that closing act.

For those who do not know Christ Jesus, the future in this world and the next will be tragic. Armageddon serves as a warning of the coming judgement and an encouragement to seek a personal relationship with Christ Jesus. As believers in Christ we are not pessimistic about the future, rather, we are realistic and know that regardless of tomorrow's headlines, our hope and our destiny is in Christ Jesus; the final Victor. It's all about a relationship and not a religion.