

Hartford Bible Students

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“Armageddon: Sorting out Fact from Fiction”

“And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” Rev. 16:16

The book of Revelation depicts the final battle between right and wrong, truth and error, as the Battle of Armageddon. There are many frightening portrayals of what some authors claim will happen during this prophetic event. These authors mistakenly portray Armageddon as a most dreadful time soon to come when all Christians will be swept up to heaven in an instant, while those who remain will be subjected to a period of shame and torment upon the earth, followed by an eternity of torture in a fiery hell. This misguided, popular view also holds that planet Earth will end in a fiery annihilation. It is important for Christians to sort out the facts based on Scripture rather than dramatized fiction. When the Scriptures are studied topically and in context, they indicate something very different than these alarming predictions about the destiny of earth and its non-Christian inhabitants.

The prophet Haggai declared that, at the conclusion of Armageddon, “the desire of all nations shall come!” (Haggai 2:7) John the Revelator stated that Armageddon will result in “the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:2) Isaiah portrayed a wonderful time of peace following Armageddon when “none shall hurt nor destroy” in all God’s holy mountain: for the earth shall then “be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:9) Yes, prophecies indicate a final Armageddon battle, but what will follow harmonizes with the loving, all wise and just character of our Creator. We are not to expect a literal gathering to the Hill of Megiddo. Rather, we are to look for that which is symbolized by that mountain.

Armageddon will be a great global conflict where God’s truth and righteousness will prevail against the forces of evil — the great controversy between truth and error with which the Christian Age will close and the Messianic Age will be ushered in.

Jesus told his disciples that the end of the age would be marked by “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall

be.” (Matthew 24:3, 21) The prophet Daniel also described this time in which we live as the time of the end during which “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation....” (Daniel 12:1) There has always been considerable trouble somewhere in the world, so why is this time period described as one of great tribulation, and what causes it?

The answers to these questions hinge on two unique realities of the time in which we live. Because of 1) the great increase in knowledge and 2) advancements in travel over the past two hundred years, the world is globally connected as never before in the history of mankind. (see Daniel 12:4) These advances have brought to humanity both a blessing and a curse. For every positive advancement in technology, there have been abuses of it for evil purposes — to gain power, control and wealth by selfish, oppressive means. The most threatening use of technology has been the advent of nuclear and chemical weapons. Humankind now has the capability to totally destroy every living thing at the whim of a reckless political leader. As a consequence of the abuse of technology, the nations are bringing upon themselves the natural consequences of sin, selfishness, pride and greed.

Another unique factor of our time related to the “increase of knowledge” is that people throughout the world are realizing that they are under bondage, and they are demanding to break free from it. Humanity is discovering that they are being held back from the dignity of their full potential. As a result, the frustrated, disillusioned masses, conscious of their weakness as compared to the establishment, are seething with discontent, often rising up in their desperation for equality and freedom from oppression. Thus far, there have only been brush fires

of revolution and anarchy throughout the earth — but these are precursors of the final Armageddon battle — when the weak overthrow their oppressors — “let the weak say, I am strong.” Joel 3:10

“Therefore 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.” (Zephaniah 3:8)

Notice here that the anger is poured upon the kingdoms of this earth, and not upon the people. What happens to the people as a result of the devouring, purifying fire of Armageddon? “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.” (Zephaniah 3:9) Then the people will finally be given the opportunity to hear and speak the truth, not the erroneous doctrines and practices which have blinded them for centuries.

Examining Zephaniah’s prophecy more closely should bring comfort to those who have been fearful. Almost all Christians believe that we are living at the end of the Christian era when God declared that “...all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” Careful study of the context indicates that fire in this citation cannot be taken literally, for God promises that He “will turn to the people a pure language....” If the earth is to be literally burned up, there will be no people to learn God’s truth. Logic dictates that the literal earth will remain, but the symbolic earth — corrupt social, financial, political and religious systems — will be dissolved to make way for the reign of righteousness.

A literal interpretation would also present a significant problem if the literal heavens were to pass away. God declares: “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool,” and “I will make the place of my feet glorious.” (Isaiah 66:1; 60:13) How glorious would the earth be if literally burned up? The symbolism of fire, here again, represents the destruction of the elements of the old earthly systems and ecclesiastical heavens which have been under the

reign of Satan and his minions. Thus, Satan’s empire will be “burned up” — destroyed in Armageddon. Recall the hope of “a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:13) Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9, 10) Jesus was telling us that God’s Kingdom will be right here on the earth!

The new heavens refer to the new spiritual ruling power of God’s Kingdom that will govern earth’s new society. The new earth will not literally be a new planet but symbolically refers to a transformed society on earth which will be holy and righteous and under the administration of the new heavens — Christ and his Church ruling from heaven.

The Scriptures speak of a constructive conclusion to this momentous Battle of Armageddon coinciding with the collapse of Satan’s present evil world. The wars, revolutions and anarchy among all nations that constitute this great time of trouble will illustrate the lasting lesson of fallen man’s inability to govern righteously and unselfishly.

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