

Charts: Events Surrounding Christ's Return: Chart #20

PREFACE

As we did in our previous session, let us begin by taking stock of the earthly situation to which Messiah will be returning. Coming back to the narrative of the Eschaton we see the world almost certainly in the worst shape it has been since Creation itself. Geographically, culturally, morally it is an absolute wreck. Even though the population has been dramatically reduced, food and water are scarce; people are sick and dying; and the entire world has been cast into impenetrable darkness. On top of all that, the world is at war: many of those who joined the world-wide government of the beast—the ten-nation coalition—are now rebelling against him and his false-prophet sidekick. Armies have advanced on his headquarters at Megiddo in Israel from the north, the south, and the east. As a result Jerusalem has once again been attacked—our best guess, by the eastern forces whose way was paved by God Himself by drying up the Euphrates with the sixth bowl of His wrath.

THREE DEMONS

It is almost impossible to designate a beginning point to Armageddon. A pretty good place to start would be in a passage we looked at last week, which describes the unholy trinity sending out demonic emissaries to gather the nations for war.

Read Revelation 16:13-14.

Verse 16 concludes this with, “And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.” One way to read this would be that while v14 gives us the *ultimate* purpose of this gathering—“for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty”—that does not necessarily mean that Satan (the earthly orchestrator of this war) reveals this purpose to the kings. I suggest the demonic spirits being sent out are influencing these kings to invade the beast in an effort to regain their sovereign power of their individual nations. They are not being told that before the war is over, they will be aligned against very God Himself, not the beast. At the same time, perhaps Satan has lied to his two beasts with a *different* misdirection, that the armies are being called in to fight God—not telling them that they would be fighting the two beasts first. After all, Satan is the “father of lies”; he is good at it.

We have already covered the movement of these armies toward Megiddo, as well as Zechariah's description of its impact on Jerusalem.

ARMAGEDDON

If one asks your average man or woman on the street, “What is the Battle of Armageddon?” the common answer will be probably be that it will be the final war before the end of the world. If one asks your average evangelical the same question, the answer will probably be that it is the final war between Christ and the armies of Antichrist. That latter answer is pretty close, but I believe the narrative requires the answer be this: The Battle of Armageddon is the last and deciding battle of a broader war that began as a world war between nations, but ended with those nations joining to fight Christ and the armies of heaven.

Preparations are made for *two* wars in the Eschaton—and Armageddon is not the last. The second preparation is absent a clever, well-known name, but is just as real, just as massive: an army formed during the Millennium, in waiting for their general, Satan himself.

I, of course, choose the words “preparations for” to describe these two events, because there *is* no battle, no fighting, in either one. Both “wars” consist of millions of combatants arrayed for battle, only to be extinguished in a moment by a word from the Lord in the first, and fire from heaven in the second ([Revelation 20:7-10](#)).

Note: In what I just said—“no battle, no fighting”—I need to differentiate between the war between the nations, the “battle” between those nations and Christ, and the aftermath of both. In the war between the nations there will indeed be fighting, bloody death and carnage, man upon man. There will be no man-to-man nor angel-to-man “combat” in the battle between the nations and Christ. But the *result* of Christ’s word (the only weapon wielded in that battle) will be a literal bloodbath ([Isaiah 34:1-8](#), [Revelation 14:17-20](#)).

Right now in the narrative, we are ready for this last battle of the world war: Armageddon.

THE WEDDING AND MARRIAGE SUPPER

Before we address Christ’s return we need to step back for just a moment and revisit something we discussed way back in Session 7: The Tribulation Fork, referring to how (shown in Chart #6) immediately after the Rapture of the church there will be two tracks running simultaneously, one in heaven and one on earth, for about seven years. So we need to look back for a moment at the wedding and marriage supper of the Lamb.

The earthly track is the Tribulation, which we have been studying for the last thirty-nine sessions, and the heavenly track, I suggested, will consist of the believers' *bema* seat judgment, followed by the wedding and marriage supper of the Lamb. (I likened the heavenly track to an end times reenactment of Noah's ark, and the earthly track, the Tribulation, to a reenactment of the flood.)

I pointed out at the time that it is very difficult to place the components of the heavenly track; on older charts of the Eschaton they are seen in a number of places. In Session 7 I submitted my rationale for placing the *bema* seat of judgment for believers shortly after the Rapture, but the placement of the wedding and wedding feast is more problematic. Most older charts show the marriage supper taking place near the end of the Tribulation period on earth, just before Christ returns in judgment—and that is roughly where I would place it. What we cannot say conclusively is the *duration* of either the judgment or the supper.

We cannot say what the heavenly wedding and marriage supper will be like; we have only the biblical picture of the earthly version to go by: "In Jewish culture, the marriage supper was the best banquet or party anyone knew; it always was an occasion of tremendous joy," (David Guzik) and went on for days. Wherever the wedding and supper fall in the timeline, they are discussed right before Christ's return in Chapter Nineteen.

Read Revelation 19:7-9.

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

In some respects it just might be worth being a relatively new Christian during the Tribulation, suffering the many plagues, persecution, and the very real potential of martyrdom—just to be there to see the Savior suddenly appear to deal out justice against those trying to kill you. The words of the old hymn by Mabel Johnston Camp seem to capture it well:

Lift up your heads, pilgrims aweary,
See day's approach now crimson the sky;
Night shadows flee, and your Beloved,
Awaited with longing, at last draweth nigh.

Dark was the night, sin warred against us;
Heavy the load of sorrow we bore;
But now we see signs of His coming;
Our hearts glow within us, joy's cup runneth o'er!

O blessed hope! O blissful promise!
Filling our hearts with rapture divine;
O day of days! Hail Thy appearing!
Thy transcendent glory forever shall shine!

I do not think that mere words can capture the drama, the overwhelming glory and power of His appearing. The best we have is Scripture itself, and we will be looking at a number of passages to get a full picture of this event. [Turn please to Isaiah 30](#). There are many references in God’s word to Christ’s return; I have selected a few that capture the multi-dimensional aspects of His second coming. I’ll begin with a couple of verses in Isaiah 64 that plead for the Lord to come down and show Himself—to reveal His power against the nations.

Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down,
That the mountains might quake at Your presence—
As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—
To make Your name known to Your adversaries,
That the nations may tremble at Your presence! (Isaiah 64:1-2)

An earlier prophecy by Isaiah captures the vivid, frightening depth to Christ’s wrath at His coming. He will no longer be the submissive “Lamb slain.”

Read Isaiah 30:27-33.

But Isaiah also included the more tender aspects of the Lord’s coming.

Read Isaiah 40:9-11.

Now turn to 2 Thessalonians, where we see both sides described.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

So in these passages (and, of course, more) we see the duality of this event. Christ is returning in fierce wrath to deal out justice and punishment for all who have rejected Him at the same time that He comes as the answer to many prayers and pleadings for Him to rescue His followers. Finally Jesus Himself describes for us the sudden abruptness of His return, and that He will be, at once, seen by all.

Read Matthew 24:27-31.

In the Rapture Christ Jesus will remain “in the air,” “in the clouds” ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)); for the second coming His feet will touch down and He will remain. He will be universally seen by all at the same time, yet along with that will be a special appearance outside Jerusalem, at the Mount of Olives.

In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. (Zechariah 14:4)

We are now ready for John's revelation of this event. [Let's return to Chapter Nineteen](#). John sees the Messiah in a more fantastical entrance, that, perhaps, will not be seen by those on earth at the time. But Scripture is clear: every last soul on earth will see His appearing, and they will know who He is. Don't waste your time trying to figure out how this feat is accomplished. He is God; He can do it.

Now is the point at which the armies of the nations turn from fighting each other and join to do battle with Christ. How long this will take, how it is accomplished we are not told. Since Christ appears everywhere at once, there need not be a mass movement of forces. Let's read what John saw.

Read Revelation 19:11-16.

When we add together various Scripture passages, we know that it is more than just angels accompanying the Lord. Coming with Him from heaven are

- the church, the bride of the Lamb (19:8);
- the OT saints, resurrected at the end of the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2);
- (?) the Tribulation martyrs (7:9)—[this according to MacArthur, yet 20:4 indicates that these are not resurrected until after Satan is bound](#);
- and, of course, the "holy angels" from heaven (Matthew 25:31).

All these accompanying the Lord will appear to those on the ground as an unbeatable army numbering millions upon millions, but they are not there to fight; not one of them will be armed. They are not coming to fight, but to reign with Christ during the Millennium.

Christ with His vast company appears, and the following things occur, we assume in close order:

- The armies are arrayed to fight Christ;
- An angel poised between earth and the sun declares in a loud voice, ...saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." (Revelation 19:17-18)

(Note that apparently the darkness of the fifth bowl [16:10] has now been at least temporarily lifted, for this angel is seen hovering between earth and the sun.)

- Then the two generals in charge of this vast army are summarily removed:
And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. (Revelation 19:20)

Don't miss that: These two alone will not be killed by the word from the Lord so that they will still be alive when Jesus casts them into the lake of fire. This is Jesus behaving in a manner different from the gospels—Jesus who said, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). That dispensation is at an end; now comes the dispensation of vengeance and wrath. No mercy will be shown to the wicked. The two in charge of all the evil of the previous seven years will be thrown—alive—into the lake of fire.

- After this Christ Jesus speaks, and every combatant remaining drops dead.
And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:21)

We are told the *instrument* of these deaths (Christ's “sword”) but not the *manner* of these deaths, but there are too many references to copious amounts of blood (e.g., [Revelation 14:20](#)) to assume that they just silently drop dead, as if being effortlessly rendered unconscious.

- Then the birds and beasts of the field begin feasting on the flesh of the millions of dead soldiers; this moment fulfills the vision of the reaping of the earth in Chapter Fourteen:

So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles. (Revelation 14:19–20)

I appreciate what John Walvoord has to say about all this vengeance and bloodshed.

Walvoord: All of these passages point to the sad conclusion that in the day of judgment it is too late for men to expect the mercy of God. There is nothing more inflexible than divine judgment where grace has been spurned. *The scene of awful judgment which comes from this background is in flat contradiction of the modern point of view that God is dominated entirely by His attribute of love.* (emphasis added)

Joseph Seiss, as is his way, offers a more florid, but eloquent description of this epochal moment.

Seiss: This tells already an awful story. It tells of the greatest of men made food for the vultures;—of kings and leaders, strong and confident, devoured on the field, with no one to bury them;—of those who thought to conquer Heaven's anointed King rendered helpless even against the timid birds;—of vaunting gods of nature turned into its cast off and most dishonored dregs.

Seiss continues: And what is thus foreintimated soon becomes reality. The Great Conqueror bows the heavens and comes down. He rides upon the cherub horse, and flies upon the wings of the wind. Smoke goes up from his nostrils, and devouring fire out of his mouth. He moves amid storms and darkness, from which the lightnings hurl their bolts, and hailstones mingle with the fire. He roars out of Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, till the heavens and the earth shake. He dashes forth in the fury of his incensed greatness amid clouds, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun frowns. The day is neither light nor dark. The mountains melt and cleave asunder at his presence. The hills bound from their seats and skip like lambs. The waters are dislodged from their channels. The sea rolls back with howling trepidation. The sky is rent and folds upon itself like a collapsed tent. It is the day for executing an armed world,—a world in covenant with Hell to overthrow the authority and throne of God,—and everything in terrified Nature joins to signalize the deserved vengeance.

J. A. Seiss, *A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text, Sixth Edition.*, vol. III, *The Apocalypse* [New York: Charles C. Cook, 1900].

SATAN IMPRISONED

In our next session we will be looking at the Millennium, but right now we close the Tribulation—and everyone said, “Amen!”—with the fitting imprisonment of the one who orchestrated all its evil.

In a passage in the prophecy of Ezekiel, where he foretells the final, post-Millennial battle and its conclusion, we discover a clue to understand why, beyond all earthly logic, Christ Jesus would *imprison* Satan, rather than throw him into the lake of fire right now, along with his servants, the two beasts.

Read Ezekiel 39:20-22.

We may not understand all the whys and wherefores of our sovereign God, but somehow He will receive glory by permitting Satan to live for another opportunity to plan his own vengeance against the Lord. His attempt will fail, of course, and he will then find himself swimming in the lake of fire along with his buddies, the two beasts. Now let's read what I see as the last three verses of the Tribulation: as it closes we literally close and lock the lid over Satan.

Read Revelation 20:1-3.

Wouldn't you like to be there—and perhaps we *will* be privileged to witness it—when this angel grabs Satan himself, that evil dragon, by the scruff of the neck and throws him into the abyss. This is the temporary, subterranean prison for demons, and it will be his home for the next one thousand years. His incarceration, as described, is “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer.”

Many like to describe the next thousand years as paradise on earth, a return to Eden—and, in some respects, with Christ holding absolute rule during this period, that can be true. Frankly, however, my response to that is always to point out vv7-8 in this chapter, what occurs immediately *after* the Millennium.

Read Revelation 20:7-8.

The question that these verses always raise for me is, *If the previous thousand years have been a paradise on earth under the rule of Christ Jesus, where did Satan so quickly find those—numbering “like the sand of the seashore”—willing to join him in one last attempt at insurrection against God?*

Next week we will dig deeper into the Millennium, but for now I suggest we think of it this way: The Millennium will indeed, in many respects, be a return to the paradise of Eden. And, just like in Eden, where sin and rebellion against God lay dormant but eventually found its way into action, sin and rebellion will gather and grow beneath the surface like a cancerous growth that begins small, but ultimately threatens the whole body.

Initially the Millennium will be peopled by the regenerate who survive the Tribulation. And wherever there is natural flesh, there will be a proclivity toward sin. This rebellion will begin small, but steadily grow, springing from their many descendants, so that when he is released from the abyss, Satan will have a ready and willing army to join him in his last gasp of insurrection before he does indeed join his compatriots in the eternal lake of fire.