

Waiting for Armageddon

by: Ronald L. Dart

Middle East peace, that sounds like a contradiction in terms, doesn't it?

I'll never forget the first time I stood on the Mount of Olives and looked out over the old city of Jerusalem, and I wondered, "Why on earth anyone would ever fight over the place? What is it? What's there?" Strategically, there's no natural resources, there's nothing there that you would think anyone would want to fight over.

In more than 4000 years of history, there has never been anything resembling peace in that part of the world. Why in the world should anyone imagine that peace will break out now?

The thing that puzzles me about the Middle East is why no one in the Western world is willing to recognize the truth about that region. Of course, diplomats, when they go charging around and doing shuttle diplomacy, talking to people, and the old idea is that as long as we're talking, we're not fighting. Well that sounds good, but the problem is so often that while they're talking they are fighting, or they are planning the next fight, and it really doesn't amount to a hill of beans.

You know it was bad enough in the Middle East before Mohammed had his vision in the caves of Arabia, but since the advent of Islam, there is only one peace that can ever exist, a peace where the whole world is in subjection to Islam and Sharia Law. That is a fundamental belief of Islamic religion.

And since the rest of the world has looked and seen how little Islam has done to better the lives of its people, they have no incentive to knuckle under to the Islamic vision.

Christians and Jews, and I hope you understand what I'm about to tell you because it's true. Christians and Jews will never be able to retain their identity before God in an Islamic world.

I fear that I see nothing but war stretching off into the indefinite future, and it focuses for some strange reason on the Middle East.

What Did Jesus Prophecy?

Even Jesus saw it so. One day when Jesus and his disciples were leaving the Temple (Matthew 24:1), the disciples were ooh-ing and ahh-ing and looking back at the Temple and pointing at it like the country boys they were, then Jesus sobered them up with a very sharp

statement. He said, "You see all these things, I'll tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left upon another, every one of them will be thrown down."

Like I said, I looked at the city of Jerusalem, I walked its streets, and I asked myself why would anyone want to be here? Sure, Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem but Jesus walks the streets of my city today, Jesus lives in me,

I don't have to go to Jerusalem to find him. He is not there, he is here.

And so I really wonder about this. Why do people want to fight over that wretched little city? And I wonder if so much blood has ever been shed over any comparable piece of real estate? Because it has gone on for so long and so often. Yes, and a lot of people died in World War II but that war only took a few years. We are talking now about a city and the area that has been at war for what, for 4000 years and for all we know longer than that.

So I stood on the Mount of Olives where Jesus followed up his prophecies for the future, and marveled at the place. I was standing there, where Jesus spoke further about what Jerusalem could expect in the years to come. You'll find all this in Matthew chapter 24 and it says in verse 3, that as "He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of your coming, and the end of the world?" Unfortunately, the translators didn't get that right. They didn't say the "end of the world", they said the "end of the age".

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Take heed that no man deceive you. Many are going to come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars." Oh my, have we heard of wars and rumors of wars, the television is full of it. Someone is fighting somewhere all the time and how much of that fighting has to do with the Middle East? More than what we think.

The End Is Not Yet

First of all, what Jesus said was, "All this has to happen, but the end is not yet."

I'd always heard as a boy growing up that one of the signs of the end was wars and rumors of wars, but that is not what Jesus said. He said, "This has to happen, but the end is not yet, nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There'll be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are only the beginning."

I marvel over that because so many people think that these are signs of the end. You will see television programs and books about it, but Jesus said "No, that's all going to happen, but the end is not yet."

Armageddon

Nevertheless, I expect you've also heard of something called Armageddon. It is a word that has entered our language and it means "The site or time of the final and conclusive battle between the forces of good and evil." I've been to Armageddon too.

I stood on the hill of Megiddo and looked out across that valley, the place called in the Bible Armageddon, and just like with Jerusalem, I wondered, "Why here? What for?" Strategically, there's no natural resources, there nothing there that you would think anyone would want to fight over.

So I looked in the Bible to see what I could find. And when you're looking up Armageddon you go to the 16th chapter of the book of Revelation.

In Revelation 16 and verse 12, "The sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates." This is the sixth of seven angels that have terrible plagues, that they are pouring out upon the earth. The sixth one, "Dries up the Euphrates to prepare the way of the Kings of the East, I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet." These are major players. The dragon is the devil. The beast is some kind of a human system that is dominating and the false prophet is a man who preaches on behalf of the whole system.

The Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty

Continuing in Revelation 16 and verse 14, "These are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth to the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty." Here's a Bible trivia question for you. This place and the battle fought here is not the battle of Armageddon, you will hear about the battle of Armageddon, but that is not the name of it. It is the battle of the great day of God Almighty and the assembly for it takes place at Armageddon.

"He gathered all these nations together into a place in the Hebrew tongue called Armageddon and the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air, and there came a great voice out of the Temple of Heaven, from the throne saying, "It is finished" and there were voices, and thundering, and lightning, and a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great."

Demonic Forces

And having read it all, I still stood looking out over that great valley and said, "Why here? What for?" The answer, I think, is very close to the reason why the Jews are such a persecuted people, and why the battles are a constant in the Middle East. When you read this chapter of Revelation there's one thing that becomes abundantly clear. There are demonic forces at work in the world.

You don't like to think about that. You know there's a devil, you know there such a thing as demon possession and many of you would say, Yes I believe there is such a thing as demon possession. But it is hard for us to realize that there's a whole spirit world in parallel with our own, which doesn't exactly occupy the same time and space, but nevertheless, it is here somehow, someway, and there are times when it breaks through into our world. It's very hard to understand why and how all this takes place. All of the evil that's in this world, yes there is such a thing as human evil, but there's an evil that seems to transcend anything that we would do.

Why Are the Jews Persecuted?

Okay, why are the Jews such a persecuted people and why are battles such a constant in the Middle East? I think it is the presence of the Jews there that accounts for it. Why the Jews? Well, because historically, they are the one ethnic people who still identify themselves by their God. They are the people of the Bible. Oh yes, they have had their problems. Yes, they've been banished. Yes, they been scattered but there is something you need to know about the Jews, with all the things that God prophesied and all the bad things he brought upon them because of their failures and their captivity of all those years, God still through his prophets said, "The time will come when I will bring you back." That is something that takes a little bit to get your mind around. God isn't finished with the Jews and the hatred that exists in the world for God focuses itself on the Jews and that hatred for God is irrational and unquenchable.

The World Will Hate You

At the Last Supper, Jesus spoke with his disciples about this hatred. He said, "If the world hate you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." This is in the 15th chapter of John and verse 18.

Now Jesus is basically sending his disciples out and he has already warned them that they are going to have persecution and trouble wherever they go, and then he said this, "If the world hates you, understand it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but you are not of the world, I have chosen you out of the world, and the world is going to hate you." Why? Because you're different. "Remember, the word that I said to you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you."

So did they persecute Jesus? Of course they did, they killed him. So are they going to persecute his disciples? Sure, it is happening in various places around the world as we speak. In Africa, Christians have been put up on slave blocks and sold off to other people.

"If they have kept My saying they will keep yours also. They're going to do all these things to you because of Me, because they don't know Him that sent me. If I had not come and

spoken to them, they would've had no sin, but now they don't have a cloak for their sin, because I came and talked to them."

Why Do People Hate God?

Then Jesus said something rather surprising in John 15 and verse 23, He said, "He that hates me hates my Father also." Of course, there's no way you can separate the two of them, and the hatred focused on Jesus actually passes through to the Father. It is the reason why they hated Jesus. "If I had not done among them the things that no other man had ever done. Maybe they would not have had sin, but they have seen and hated both Me and My Father, but this will come to pass." Now he is going to quote from the Psalms, "That the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, they hated Me without a cause" (Psalms 35:19, 69:4, 109:3-4).

This is what you need to understand about anti-Semitism, it is rooted in a hatred of God. You might ask yourself, why would anybody hate God? Why would any man hate God? And if you tossed the word man into it you may have found the root to understanding. There is a real, visceral hatred of God on the part of one called Satan, because of the enmity that grew between them in the time before time. When he was at war with God, and came to hate God and does everything he can to spread hatred of God here, right here, right now. Do they have a cause for it? No. They don't need no cause. They hate him because of who he is and what he stands for.

Anti-Semitism is rooted in the hatred of God and the wars that are fought over the Middle East are because it is the place where God revealed himself.

Do Jews and Muslims Worship the Same God?

You know, you would think, the Jews and the Muslims worship the same God, and that the hatred of God would not be a factor, but you'd be wrong. They do not worship the same God. The standards of the one God are quite different from the standards from the other. The policies of the one God are very different. The character of the one God is very different from the other. You can see this in the hatred of Muslims for the Jews, which is deep and wide and permanent.

So there'll be no peace in the Middle East, not now, not in this age, and the wars will go on until Armageddon, the site or the time of the final and conclusive battle between the forces of good and evil, as it is called.

Why Armageddon?

Why Armageddon? Now that's an interesting question. In history the reason was topographic. Invasion into Israel, even from nations coming from the Southeast, entered the land of Palestine from the North. Why? Well, that vast desert to the East, while it is not

impassable, it is no simple matter to bring an army across it, so they went north up the Euphrates, where they had water and then West of this area where they assembled for the coming assault to the South on Jerusalem.

Why bother? You cannot find a geographic, a commercial or any other cause for why it's important for them to come over there and assault Jerusalem.

A Prophecy of Isaiah

Now there was an ancient prophecy of a type of the battle of Armageddon and it is cited there and, you know, Isaiah told us that "We should consider the former things what they are, so that we can understand the latter end thereof" (Isaiah 41:22). This is a case in point.

This prophecy was delivered by Isaiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, which came necessarily from the North. At the time Isaiah wrote that 10th chapter, the Assyrians were the dominant power in the world. They had already invaded once and carried off Samaria and the ten northern tribes. Now they were coming back to chastise Judah.

In chapter 10 of Isaiah and in verse five, God speaks to the Assyrians and he says, "O, Assyrian, the rod of my anger, the staff in their hand is my indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath. I'm going to give him a charge, to take the spoil, and the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of streets."

The Assyrian himself, merely served as an instrument of God to chastise, so he invaded. In fact, this particular invasion, he came all the way down and besieged Jerusalem, took all of her surrounding cities, Lachish and other places and destroyed them. Jerusalem was left sitting there all by itself. The people from all the surrounding areas and villages had run into the walled city for protection. There they were, but the Assyrian had been used by God to chastise, got a little bit too big for his own eyes.

Continuing in verse seven, "Howbeit", he goes on to say, "he's going to take down the prey, and tread them down like the mire of streets, but he didn't really mean to do this, his heart doesn't think so, although it is in his heart to destroy and cutoff nations, not a few." In other words, he doesn't really realize what he's doing. He just knows he wants to go out and subjugate nations, but he doesn't really understand and didn't mean to go as far as he went.

Then the Assyrian rattles off some of his conquests, concluding that Jerusalem is no better than any of these places, I'll conquer them, just like everybody else.

Continuing in verse 12, God says "Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when I perform my whole work upon Mount Zion, and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks, because he says by the strength of my hand, I have done it, by my wisdom for I am wise, and I have removed the bounds of the people, I have robbed their treasures, and I put down the inhabitants like a valiant man." All

this stuff, he said "I gathered that from all over the place for no one moved a wing or opened their mouth or peeped."

Then God speaks in reply to the Assyrian in verse 15, "Shall the ax boast itself against him that cuts with it? Shall the saw magnify itself against him, that shakes it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or the staff should lift itself up as if it were not wood."

"This is what the Lord says, the Lord of hosts, he will send among his fat ones leanness, and under his glory he will kindle a burning like the burning of a fire, and the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame and it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day."

We're going to ruin Assyria. He says that, "The light of Israel shall consume the glory of his forest, of his fruitful field, both soul and body, and they shall be as when the standard-bearer faints and falls, and nobody knows where to go into battle."

So, the Lord prophesies the utter and complete fall of Assyria. The connection then is asked, how does that relate to Armageddon?

Assyrians Marched To Jerusalem

Years ago I was teaching a Bible class and I brought them to this particular chapter of Isaiah and I came down to verse 28 of Isaiah 10. I will give you the reference there so you can go look it up and do what I did. There's a list of towns, in fact the Assyrians is traced through this list of towns, so I decided I'd find them on a map. I got my Bible Atlas out and looked them up. I found something strange, they actually start in the North near Megiddo and these cities wind like a snake, down toward the South. But if you draw a line from the Valley of Megiddo to Jerusalem, they all straddle this line as it comes down. What you have is a picture of the Assyrian who puts all of his armies together and his armies were combined of different nations at that time. He assembled them all in the valley of Megiddo and then they marched South toward Jerusalem.

Then in verse 32, he makes his way all the way down to a place called Nob and he shakes his fist against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. He comes to where he could see it. He's in sight of the city and in verse 33 says, "Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror, and the high ones of stature and should be cut down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, Lebanon will fall by a mighty one."

What Does It Have to Do With Armageddon?

You know, it's like you took an ax out to a tree and you found a good long branch, and you took your ax out and with one big stroke, you hacked off the branch and it fell to the ground.

But didn't this happen in history? Aren't we talking in Isaiah about something that happened and it's over, it's past and done with? Yes, that's true. But what does it have to do with Armageddon? Well, perhaps more than what you might think. The reason that struck me with it was as I was studying it in preparation for a class on the Old Testament, and I had sorted out this particular passage and then I started reading the 11th chapter. You have to remember, chapter breaks were added by men, and this is just a continuation of what he was saying before.

Isaiah says in Chapter 11, verse one, "There shall come forth a rod of the stem of Jesse, a Branch shall grow out of his roots, the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."

This is widely understood to be a prophecy of the Messianic Kingdom.

He said "I will make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, he will not judge after the sight of his own eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears, but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with fairness the meek of the earth, he will smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

Waiting on Armageddon

Do you understand where we are at here? This is looking down to the Messianic Kingdom, to the return of Christ, and the establishment of it and is placed in context with something that happened in history, when armies assembled at Megiddo, and marched South to Jerusalem and were destroyed when they got there. Apparently something very much like this still lies in our future.

In Isaiah 11 and verse 5 he goes on to say this about the one who would rule, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins, The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Wow! "A cow can feed alongside the bear, their young ones shall lie down together." Now I have to tell you, I don't necessarily think what he means here is that there is going to be some kind of an internal change in the character of the animals. The kingdoms of the world are compared to animals and I think the picture you're getting here is that all of these wild animals that have been fighting and destroying one another are going to stop it and lie down together.

Continuing in verse nine, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Now you wouldn't think so, but the invasion that is described in chapter 10 is a type of what is to come in the last days, which is going to be followed by the glorious kingdom of God and the

beginning of the end starts in a geographical location called Armageddon, and that is precisely where we find ourselves.

According to the book of Revelation, what happens after that? In Revelation 16 and verse 15, he says, "Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. He gathers them together in a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. And the seventh angel poured out his vial in the air, and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, it is done and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake, such as was not since there were men on the earth. And the great city was divided in three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. There fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because of all the terrible things that were happening."

But then, the book Revelation leaves the issue hanging in midair. That's a strange thing isn't it? It departs a description of Babylon the great, and he goes all the way through the terrible things relating to the city of Babylon, and finally, Revelation 18 and in verse 21, "A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, and said, thus with violence shall the great city Babylon be thrown down, and found no more at all."

Then John sees a great vision in heaven with a white horse and Christ sitting on it, prepared to make war, and he calls together all the fowls and the vultures of heaven, and says, come and make a feast on the bodies of the men who assemble at Armageddon and came against God at Jerusalem."

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by the late Ronald L. Dart titled: "Waiting for Armageddon" (09WFA) 1/6/09

Transcribed by: bb 8/11/11 | Rev. 1.1

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You can contact Christian Educational Ministries:

P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791

Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

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