



9. APOCALYPSE OF THE EMPIRE

People have various opinions as to how the world will end: A terrorist nuclear or biological attack; outbreaks of disease; asteroids smashing into the planet; religious extremists; social disintegration and ethnic cleansing; and over-population. However the Bible reveals that the end of the world as we know it will coincide with the return of Jesus Christ. This event is mentioned some 1500 times in the Bible. Whole chapters (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) and two entire books (Daniel & Revelation) are devoted to the subject. In the Old Testament for every prophecy of Christ's first coming there are 8 prophecies of His second coming. Obviously it is a critical event in earth's history.

It is of utmost significance because of its threefold purpose. Firstly He is coming to gather together His forever friends in order to take them home as He promised (John 14:1-3). Jesus will come back to take us to live with Him in His Father's house. The Father's house where God lives is in heaven. We acknowledge this every time we say the Lord's Prayer - "Our Father who is in heaven." Christ is coming to raise to life His friends who have died and then to take them and His friends who are still alive back to His Father's home to live with Him (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Secondly Christ is coming to give His friends new bodies and immortality with no more sickness and old age with its multitudinous health problems (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). The blind will see. The deaf will hear. The dumb will speak and the lame will walk. What a day that will be!

Finally He is coming to put a forever end to evil (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:8). No more wars! No more hatred! No more broken homes! No more negatives in life!

In all of this Jesus is saying, *"I have not forgotten My forever friends. You are still My children and I'm coming back FOR YOU! I know your heart is broken, I know your spirit is crushed. I know your body is wracked in pain, I know you wonder, can I hope again? I know your dreams are shattered, I know your marriage is gone. You're at the end of your last rope - but hold on - I'm coming to take you home. Let not your heart be troubled, for I will come again for you. I will give you new bodies with immortality and put an end to all that is evil!"*

Which brings us to the Battle of Armageddon. Many believe this battle will be fought on the plain of Jezreel near the ancient city of Megiddo. This Battle is mentioned under the 6th apocalyptic plague (Revelation 16:12-16). So just what is this battle all about? We have seen there are many symbols in the Apocalypse – the Dragon is Satan; the Lamb is the crucified Jesus; Israel is the church of Jews and non-Jews. The name Armageddon is also a symbol. Armageddon comes from two words – "Har" and "Megiddon." Har means mountain, and Megiddon means slaughter. Armageddon is thus, "the Mountain of Slaughter." Megiddo was a small city on a hill overlooking the Plain of Jezreel. So important was this strategically located city during ancient times that the Egyptians even occupied it. In Biblical history important battles took place on this plain below Megiddo, in which God fought for His people by slaughtering their enemies in order to deliver them from evil powers. For example on this plain, through God's power, Gideon with just 300 men defeated an enormous army of thousands of Midianites. Also Megiddo is at the end of the Carmel ranges on which Elijah had a showdown with the prophets of Baal as to who was the God of Israel. When Jehovah God sent fire to consume His sacrifice, all Israel recognized Jehovah was God and Baal an impotent fraud. It was then that Elijah had the prophets of Baal slaughtered at the bottom of Mt Carmel on the edge of the Jezreel plain.

So, will Armageddon be a literal battle fought out on the plain of Jezreel near the city of Megiddo between the armies of all the nations on earth? There is no way the armies of all the nations would ever fit into this relatively small plain. The Bible says this great battle is firstly "God's battle" not "man's battle" (Revelation 16:14,16). It is God's battle with end-time evil and the 3 evil powers behind it all. A battle which John saw takes place when Jesus comes as King of Kings and Lord of Lords under the symbol of a rider on a white horse (Revelation 19:11,16,19,20). It is God's justice meted out on end-time evil. A battle follows, which climaxes with the collapse and destruction of the Babylonian trio, consisting of the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet, through the mightiest earthquake ever to rock the planet (Revelation 16:17-21). This is the same earthquake described earlier in the Apocalypse which occurs at the time of the return of Christ (Revelation 6:12-17). Armageddon is thus God's battle against the end-time evil powers and their followers at the second coming of Jesus. The battle is that part of the second coming of Jesus which puts evil to a forever end. The second coming is good news for at this time Jesus: 1. Raises His dead friends to a forever life; 2. Gathers His living friends too; 3. Gives all of His friends new bodies with immortality; 4. And puts down all evil.

But how will Jesus come to end the world as we know it? Peter makes it explosively clear that Jesus' second coming will be the greatest sound and light show the world has ever witnessed (2 Peter 3:9,10). Some individuals have gotten confused about the "thief in the night" reference of Peter here, thinking it means that Christ will return secretly and stealthily. But verse 10 makes it abundantly clear that there will be nothing hidden or secret about the return of the King of Kings to His rightful planet usurped by the fallen rebel angel Satan! There's no tiptoeing back to earth for Jesus according to Peter. The "thief in the night" metaphor that the Bible uses is intended to describe the "unexpectedness" of Christ's return for most of this planet. Thieves are not necessarily silent when they break into a house, but they are nearly always "unexpected." It is the nature and success of thieves that they strike when you least expect them to. Christ is no thief - but alas, His unexpected return will catch many human beings totally unprepared! Peter clearly describes the entire planet in chaos at the return of Christ - no secret arrival here!

Jesus, talking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives expressed the point, taken up later by Peter, that like a thief His unexpected return will catch many human beings totally unprepared (Matthew 24:42-44)! But now take specific note of Jesus' own description of His Second Coming in Matthew 24:21-27, 30,31. Nobody will be sleeping through this worldwide climactic event that is Christ's return. Jesus makes it plain that His Second Coming will not be secret, stealthy or silent. And Paul says a trumpet will be blown to raise Christ's friends from death. There's nothing secret about that (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17)!

If you've accepted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord and friend, this subject is about the greatest news in all the world! - "I WILL COME AGAIN." That's the way the two angels presented the subject to the disciples of Jesus as they stood on top of the Mount of Olives watching Him disappear into the sky - "This same Jesus will come again," they reminded them (Acts 1:9-11). The very same Jesus who embraced us with His Father's love while He was here in our midst. The same Jesus who sat around our tables, and ate our meals, and shared our laughter, and wept our tears, and lived our life, and died our death, and rose for our resurrection. This same Jesus - no replacement, no substitute teacher, no substitute Saviour - the very same Jesus we came to know and love when He was here amongst us. No secret coming, no stealthy return according to the angels. He will come back to us the very way He left us: Personally, publicly, plainly and powerfully. So much so that Revelation records it this way, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7).

"I will come again!" No wonder the Bible calls it "The Blessed Hope" (Titus 2:13). What do we need to do to have that hope? The answer is given as the book of Revelation ends - Come! Come! Come! If anyone is thirsty for eternal life let them come as they are (Revelation 22:17). Why not be ready for earth's long awaited blessed hope - the return of Jesus the one who loved you so much that He gave everything, including His life for you? Why not come to Him and accept Him as your friend and Saviour? He's waiting for you! (2 Peter 3:9,10)