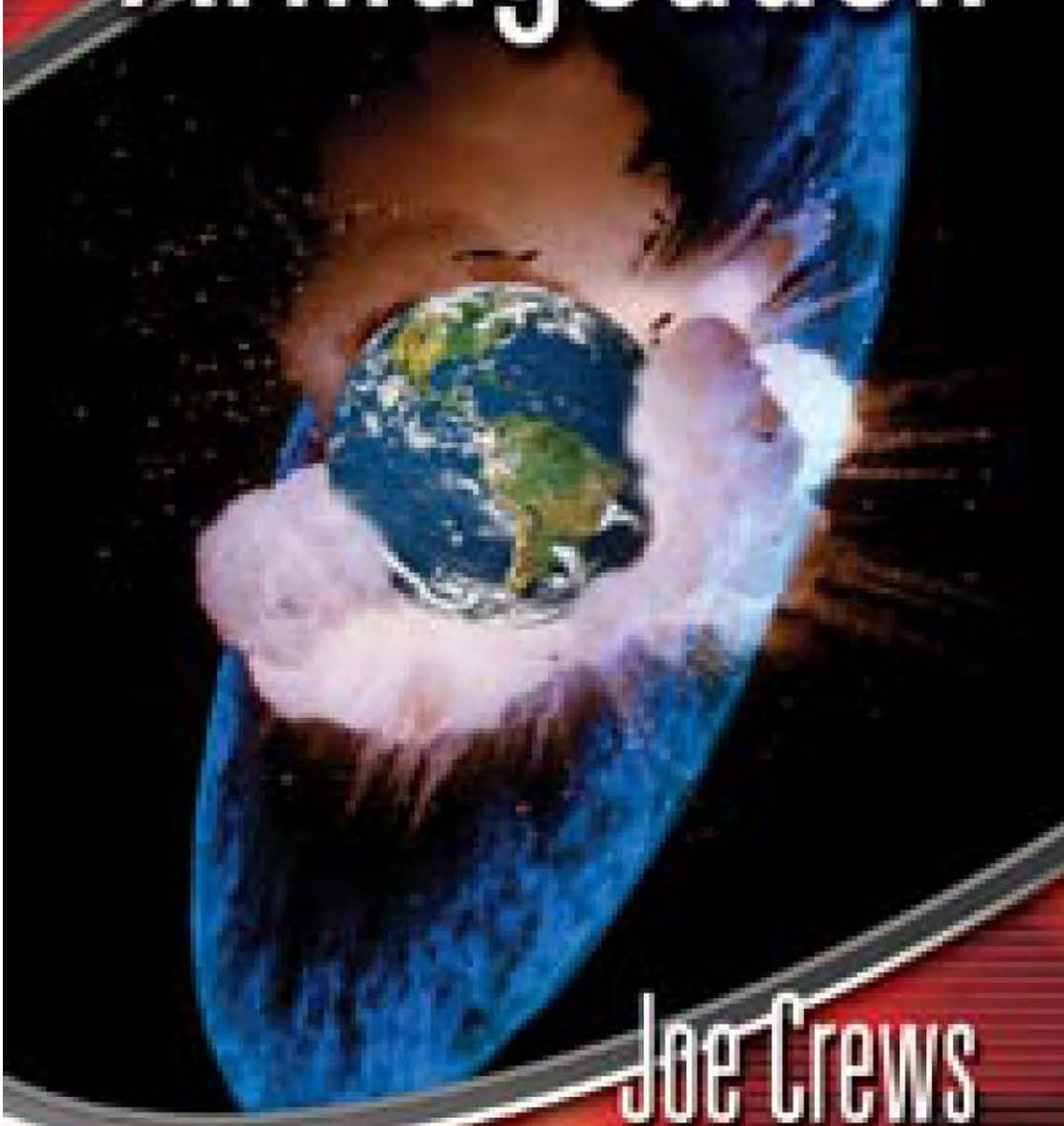


Armageddon



Joe Crews

Library of Sermons #1

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By Joe Crews

1 ISRAEL'S FINAL WAR

The signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty on March 26, 1979, marked an emotional moment in the history of the Middle East. After years of bitter animosity punctuated by military conflict, an Arab nation and a Jewish nation embraced each other with promises of peace.

What did it signify for the little pocket of Zionism whose struggles for survival have drawn United States approval and support? Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, before his death, was unable to provide the security and permanent peace which has eluded Israel since the days of Abraham. The answer to Israel's dilemma is clearly revealed in the fantastic prophecies of the Bible.

According to the Word of God, Israel will not find true deliverance from her enemies until it is secured for her by the kings of the east. Her last war has not yet been fought. The book of Revelation describes an alliance with some powerful defenders who finally destroy the oppressors of Israel and establish her in eternal security. Those allies are given the enigmatic title "kings of the east" in Revelation 16:12. They actually intervene to deliver Israel during the war of Armageddon, described in the Bible as the final conflict to take place on this planet. All nations will be involved in this battle, but Israel will be the only victor.

Our purpose in this study is to answer a number of questions. What is the nature of that final war of Armageddon? How can all the countries of the world be involved in it? How is it possible for only one group, the people of Israel, to survive this holocaust? Who are the mysterious kings of the east that effect her victory? And finally, how is Israel delivered from her enemies by the drying up of the Euphrates River, as described in Revelation 16:12?

First of all, we need to find out if the present nation of Israel is the same Israel which is designated in the book of Revelation as the people of God. Some tremendous prophecies are found in that book, most of them concerned with saving the embattled remnant group of faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Those followers are sometimes referred to as the "tribes of Israel" and spoken of in the context of Jewish customs. Does this mean that the literal nation of Israel—the one which is fighting with tanks and bombs—will completely reverse itself and become Christians? Will they lay aside their Zionist ambitions to kill their attackers and espouse the peaceful principles of the Sermon on the Mount—the one about loving the enemy and turning the other cheek?

Millions of Bible students believe that this kind of spectacular conversion must take place in order for Bible prophecy to be fulfilled. They base their belief upon the prophecies found in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc., regarding Israel's restoration and final triumph. Are they correct? It is true that the prophets painted glowing word pictures of Israel's future and recorded scores of promises about her authority over other nations. But is the Israel of the Old Testament the same Israel of the book of Revelation? Were the promises unconditional and irrevocable? Will the literal, fleshly descendants of Abraham turn en masse to the Messiah, be restored as a nation, and saved as a people?

2 PROMISES TO ISRAEL CONDITIONAL

A careful study of the Bible reveals that those promises of the Old Testament were not unconditional promises at all. Repeatedly, the nation of Israel was warned of the dire consequences of disobedience. Both blessing and curse were set before them, depending on obedience or disobedience. Because of continued patterns of rebellion, God allowed them to be decimated and scattered into Babylonian captivity for seventy years. Many prophets were raised up by God to foretell their return from that captivity. Some modern commentators have made the mistake of applying those prophecies of restoration to some future gathering of Israel. They refuse to see that the restoration spoken of by Isaiah and Jeremiah has already taken place.

There is neither time nor space to record here a fraction of the graphic threats of rejection made to Israel. Over and over God gave warnings like this: "And if thou wilt ... do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: *Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever ... But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments ... Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all*

people" (1 Kings 9:4-7).

Finally, as related through the prophet Daniel, God allotted a probationary period of 490 years for the Jewish people to see what they would do about the Messiah (Daniel 9:24). That prophetic time period of 70 weeks (a day for a year, Ezekiel 4:6) began with the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem (Artaxerxes' decree in 457 B.C., Ezra 7:11) and ended in A.D. 34. In that same year the gospel began to go to the Gentiles, Stephen was stoned, and Paul went forth to begin his unique ministry to the non-Jews. The occasion marked the formal and final separation of Israel from its covenant relationship.

Jesus had explained to the Jewish leaders in the clearest possible language that their rejection of Him would seal their own rejection as the children of the kingdom. "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43).

There is no mystery as to why the hundreds of specific Old Testament promises were never fulfilled to Israel. They utterly failed to meet the conditions of obedience. Otherwise, they would have inherited the earth, been delivered from all their enemies, and made Jerusalem the worship center for all nations.

3 WHO IS TRUE ISRAEL?

The big question is this: Will God's promises fail just because the literal descendants of Abraham did not meet the terms of the covenant? Were the promises transferred to that other "nation" to whom Jesus said the kingdom would be given? Or must we still put our faith in some future turnaround that will restore national Israel to the divine favor? All those points will be completely clarified the moment we establish one basic rule of biblical interpretation. Without this principle in mind no one can properly understand the books of Daniel and Revelation, nor can we identify the true Israel of today.

Here is the rule: *There is a primary, local, literal application of prophecy which points to a future, worldwide, spiritual application.* By applying this principle to the Old Testament Scriptures there is absolutely no confusion as to the place of Israel in prophecy and history.

All the glorious promises were *primarily* aimed toward immediate blessings that God wanted to bestow on the nation. But in a *secondary* sense they pointed forward to a larger spiritual fulfillment on a worldwide level. Even though the local fulfillment failed when Israel failed to be faithful, the promises were never nullified or withdrawn. They will be honored, but only to that "nation" which Jesus said must replace the Jews as receivers of the kingdom. Who is that nation and people? The New Testament is saturated with the most explicit statements as to who the new Israel is.

Peter describes those "which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God" in these words: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, 10). Here is the new nation which replaces the nation of Israel. The Gentiles who will receive the true Messiah now enter into the New Covenant, ratified by the blood of the cross, and become the true spiritual Israel of God. They who were not God's people become His "holy nation."

Will they receive the very same promises that were given to Abraham's descendants? Indeed, the Bible says that they are counted as the actual seed of Abraham. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and *heirs according to the promise*" (Galatians 3:29). Paul makes it even clearer in Romans 9:8. "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are *counted for the seed.*" Again, Paul wrote, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart" (Romans 2:28, 29).

Notice that true Israel will be characterized by circumcision of the heart and not of the flesh. What is heart circumcision? "Ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11). Don't miss the significance of that text. Just as the Old Covenant was represented by the cutting off of the physical flesh, so the New Covenant would be exemplified by the cutting off of the fleshly nature of sin. In other words, all who accept Christ and are born again are the truly circumcised and the only true Jews. And according to Paul they also will inherit the promises made to Abraham.

After the crucifixion of Christ, there is not one indication that the literal Jews were accorded any recognition as the children of God. It is true that the door was left open through the preaching of the apostles until A.D. 34, the end of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy. *But from that time on no recognition is given to Israel as a nation.* Israel henceforth is God's people, made up of all those who accept the Saviour, whether Jew or Gentile. The Old Testament imagery and terminology is still used, especially in the book of Revelation, but Israel is now the church.

So we can see that there was no failure of the promises at all. They simply were transferred to the true spiritual Israel, which is the church, made up of all true believers in Christ. And the things that will happen to the church spiritually were foreshadowed by what happened to ancient Israel in a literal sense. Let's look at a simple example of this principle in operation.

In the midst of Ezekiel's portrayal of Israel's victory over her enemies and influence over the nations, he began to describe a magnificent temple that would be built. Several chapters (40-48) are devoted to the precise measurements and physical appointments of that temple. *Yet the temple has never been built.* Other prophets referred to the program of building or restoring such a temple. Amos prophesied, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11).

Many modern interpreters apply this promise to some future construction of a physical temple. But the Bible principle is that there is a secondary, worldwide fulfillment which is not physical, but spiritual. The New Testament confirms this by explaining how the prophecy of Amos has been fulfilled. "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up" (Acts 15:14-16).

Please notice how the Old Testament temple prophecies apply to the living church! The physical temple has now become the spiritual temple of the church, made up of Gentiles and all true believers. No one should now be looking for any restored, literal temple to be built. The body of Christ's church is now the temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), and we are the "lively stones" of that "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5).

Some have felt confused because much of the Old Testament terminology is carried over into the New Testament description of the church—words like kingdom, nation, Israel, temple, Jerusalem, Zion, tribes of Israel, etc. Even Christ said to the Pharisees, "The *kingdom* of God shall be taken from you, (literal Israel) and given to a *nation* (spiritual Israel) bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). This is one reason the futurists and dispensationalists believe the book of Revelation pertains to the literal Jew in modern Israel. But there is no cause for such confusion. The explanation had been so clearly made in so many places that the New Testament writer assumed all were aware that the church now replaced national Israel.

4 THE TWO BABYLONS

As we enter into a study of Armageddon, it is tremendously important to keep this great rule of interpretation before us. The vast confusion on prophecy today stems from ignorance of this principle. Let us repeat once more that the kingdom prophecies given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc., have a double application—one to be fulfilled locally; the other to be fulfilled on a worldwide scale in the last days. And the church takes the place of the nation as God's true chosen people. With this background we are prepared to study the subject of Armageddon. That world-ending conflict is tied closely to the things we have just stated about spiritual Israel and a secondary application of prophecy. A most amazing parallel exists between what happened to ancient Israel and the events concerning spiritual Israel in the book of Revelation.

Ancient Israel		Spiritual Israel
Jer. 50:33,34	Persecuted by Babylon	Rev. 17:6
Dan. 3:13	Forced to worship image	Rev. 13:15
Dan. 4:30	Called "Babylon the Great"	Rev. 17:5
Jer. 51:13,14	Babylon sits on many waters	Rev. 17:1
Isa. 44:27,28	Rescued—dried Euphrates	Rev. 16:12
Jer. 51:6-8	Called out of Babylon	Rev. 18:4
Isa. 45:1	Rescuer called the anointed	Dan. 9:25
Isa. 41:2, 25	Both rescuers from east	Mat. 24:27, Rev. 7:2

You will notice that God's people had almost the same experience in the Old Testament and the New Testament. They were forced to worship an image and were rescued by someone from the east who dried up the river Euphrates to set them free. Within this broad outline there are scores of other astonishing similarities between the two Israels—one literal and the other spiritual.

It is obvious that the church—God's people of the last days—will be persecuted and threatened with death just like ancient Israel. In the book of Revelation they are delivered from spiritual Babylon in connection with the battle of Armageddon. "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And 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. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. ... And he gathered them together in a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon"

(Revelation 16:12-16).

These verses are filled with great meaning. They reveal that three powerful forces will be utilized by Satan in preparing the way for Armageddon. Those three—the beast, dragon and false prophet—stir up the political powers of earth to take part in that war. It is apparent that those three are religious powers, at least in their claims, because they *work miracles* to impress the governments of the earth. Miracles are only operative within the realm of religion.

Time and space does not allow us to give all the biblical evidence to show how these three symbols incorporate all the modern forms of counterfeit religion. Rejecting the authority of God's law and choosing the easy traditions of pagan worship patterns, these combined ecclesiastical systems will wield a mighty influence in drawing all the world into the battle of Armageddon.

5 ARMAGEDDON—SATAN VS. GOD

Before we try to determine the identity of the “kings of the east” and what it means to “dry up the river Euphrates,” we must understand more clearly what Armageddon really involves. The Scriptures picture it as the final decisive struggle which climaxes the age-long war between Christ and Satan. The entire world is involved because the good and evil people are scattered among all nations of the earth. Armageddon represents the all-out effort of Satan to destroy the people who dare to obey God in the face of threatened torture and death.

Armageddon is but the climax of a 6,000 year program by Satan to keep God's people from being saved. As the adversary, whose self-seeking caused him to be cast out of heaven, Satan declared his purpose to overthrow God and take over His universal government. Listen to his boast in Isaiah 14:13, 14. “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”

This incredible claim of Satan exposes the heart of his plan to set himself up in place of God. To subvert the *worship* of God's subjects to himself it would seem both natural and necessary for Satan to build his appeal around *religion*. Working in the guise of counterfeit religious systems and false worship, he has woven a clever composite of truth and error down through the ages. His masterpiece of deception will occur at the end-time when he works through the beast power to enforce a mark of loyalty on every person. Those who refuse the mark will be sentenced to death, and thus, the final obstacle will be removed for Satan to claim all creation as his followers. So reads the blueprint of Satan's strategy.

6 GOD DWELLS IN ZION

Now notice, again, where Satan wanted to sit. He said, “I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, *in the sides of the north*.” Why did he say that? This point is very important. The expression “mount of the congregation” is undoubtedly referring to the holy mount of God's dwelling place. Throughout the Bible it is spoken of as mount Zion. “Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the *sides of the north*, the city of the great King” (Psalm 48:2).

The striking thing is that God's place, mount Zion, is located in the sides of the north. Now we understand why Satan wanted to sit on the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. That is where God will gather His people, His congregation. Mount Zion is a place of safety. Satan wants to destroy the congregation or people of God. He would penetrate the very elect by his deceptions and take them, along with the throne of God. The psalmist said, “Sing praises to the Lord, *which dwelleth in Zion*” (Psalm 9:11).

Originally, Zion was the designated spot where the temple was located, in the north part of Jerusalem. Later, it came to be known as a symbol of the city of Jerusalem. It also is applied throughout Scripture to the whole of God's people. But after the Jews rejected Jesus the term Zion became the designation for the church. Thus in the New Testament it no longer identifies an earthly location, but a people—the people of the church who are scattered throughout the world, or else the spiritual place of God's presence and protection.

All through the Bible God is described as drawing or gathering His people to Zion where they can be safe with Him. “Blow the trumpet in *Zion*, ... call a solemn *assembly*: Gather the people, sanctify the *congregation*” (Joel 2:15, 16). “For in *mount Zion* ... shall be *deliverance*” (Joel 2:32). In Revelation 14:1 the redeemed are pictured as having been delivered from the beast power of the previous chapter and are safe in *mount Zion*. “And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.”

But while God programs a gathering of His people to Himself in Zion, Satan also has a gathering program. *It is a gathering of his forces for Armageddon*. “For they are the spirits of devils ... to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.... And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon” (Revelation 16:14, 16). This gathering is to counteract God's gathering His saints to mount Zion. Joel also speaks about that same gathering; “Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye

heathen, and gather yourselves together round about ... Let the heathen ... come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat ... The Lord also shall roar out of Zion ... but the Lord will be the hope of his people" (Joel 3:11, 12, 16).

This is another description of that final conflict called Armageddon. The valley of Jehoshaphat is just another title for the place of battle. It will involve every nation on earth. The "heathen" is a term to describe those who are not God's people. Satan will marshal the kings of the earth and all the wicked people to oppose the faithful saints of God. The Lord will be involved in the battle ("The Lord shall roar out of Zion"), because He fights for His people. In essence, it is a tremendous contest between Christ and Satan with followers of both sides being involved. Here is where we get to the heart of the subject. The verse calls attention to the Hebrew word for Armageddon. Apparently, the word is rooted in the Hebrew term "har moed," which means "mount of the congregation" or "mount of the assembly." Do you see where this leads us? That same term (har moed) was used by Satan when he said, "I will sit also upon the *mount of the congregation*." This ties the battle of Armageddon to the original threat of Satan to capture and destroy the congregation of God—in mount Zion.

And the final attempt of the evil one to carry out his threat reaches down to the very last events of this earth. John the Revelator described it under the sixth plague. He saw unclean spirits going out to the kings of the earth, working miracles, and gathering them to Armageddon. These are religious forces working on the political rulers and influencing them to destroy God's faithful ones.

If you want to read the thrilling account of God's part in Armageddon, study Revelation 19. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war ... And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses clothed in fine linen, white and clean ... and he treadeth the *winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*" (Revelation 19:11-15).

Several things stand out in this symbolic picture of Christ and His second coming. The armies of heaven make war and "smite the nations" (Verse 15). These are the nations which were stirred by evil spirits in Revelation 16:14. Christ prevails in this Armageddon clash. Notice that this war is described as treading the winepress of the wrath of God. In Revelation 15:1 the seven last plagues are designated as "the wrath of God." Since the battle of Armageddon is set up under the sixth plague, and the plagues are called the wrath of God; and since Christ's army makes war by treading the winepress of God's wrath, we must conclude that Revelation 19 is a clear picture of Armageddon.

Incidentally, the vials of the wrath of God were poured on the whole earth. "Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." (Revelation 16:1). This is why all the nations are involved in Armageddon. The good and evil of all the world will be drawn into it. Since God's people are scattered in every country, the entire earth is spoken of as being affected by the plagues, one of which is Armageddon.

7 EUPHRATES DRIED UP

We are now prepared to examine Revelation 16:12 and let the Bible interpret the "drying up of the great river Euphrates" to prepare the way for the "kings of the east." Whatever these events are, they occur as Armageddon approaches a violent climax.

In order to understand this prophecy, we must refer to the parallel experience of ancient Babylon. Six hundred years before Christ was born, the pagan kingdom of Babylon was the great enemy of God's people. For 70 years they held the Hebrew people in subjection and bondage. Finally Babylon was overthrown by Cyrus the Mede, and the Israelites were delivered. Cyrus came from the east and captured Babylon by diverting the Euphrates River, thus getting access under the water gates of the channel. God said to Babylon, "I will *dry up thy rivers*. ... Thus saith the Lord to his *anointed*, to Cyrus ... to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut" (Isaiah 44:27; 45:1). God "raised up the righteous man (Cyrus) from the east" (Isaiah 41:2). Cyrus is referred to by God as the "anointed" and "the righteous man."

According to the principle of interpretation, the *literal* account in the Old Testament must be applied in a *spiritual* sense at the end-time. Thus, we read in the book of Revelation about spiritual Israel (the church) being oppressed by "Babylon the Great" (Revelation 17:5, 6). This Babylon is not a physical kingdom but a counterfeit religious system manipulated by Satan. God's people are finally delivered from the power of spiritual Babylon by the drying up of the waters of the river Euphrates. "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" (Revelation 16:12).

The startling similarity to the Old Testament story is obvious, but we must remember that the secondary application cannot be literal. The immediate fulfillment is always literal and local, but the last-day fulfillment reaches worldwide and has a spiritual application only.

So we do not expect a literal Cyrus to dry up a literal river to deliver a literal Israel. We have already discovered that all God's true people are spiritual Israelites. Now what does the water represent? "The waters which thou sawest ... are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15). In

this chapter Babylon the Great is pictured as sitting “upon many waters” (Revelation 17:1). The waters are identified as people and nations who give support to the great Babylon harlot (false religion) who persecutes the true saints (Revelation 17:6).

So the drying up of the waters would represent the withdrawing of support by those people who had been followers of the Babylon system. This is one of the final events that happens just before the coming of Christ. The people recognize that they have been duped, and in a rage they turn on each other. Zechariah describes what takes place under this seventh plague as Armageddon reaches its climax. “And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem (God’s people); ... And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and *his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour*” (Zechariah 14:12, 13).

John described the scene thus, “These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire” (Revelation 17:16). Just as literal Euphrates in ancient Babylon was turned from an asset to a means of destroying her, so the supporting waters (people) of the spiritual Babylon turn into the means of her destruction. This drying up of support prepares the way for the “kings of the east” to come and deliver the people of God from the hand of Babylon.

8 WHO ARE THE KINGS OF THE EAST?

Who are these “kings of the east”? Here is one of the most exciting aspects of the battle of Armageddon. Just as God’s place in Zion was located in the “sides of the north,” so His approach is always referred to as from the east. Why? Because anciently Zion was the actual hill north of the city of Jerusalem. Anyone coming from the east had to angle north because of the impassable deserts, and come into Zion from that direction. This is why both north and east are used in the Bible for God’s quarters. “And I saw another angel ascending *from the east*, having the seal of the living God” (Revelation 7:2).

Christ will return to this earth from the east. “For as the lightning cometh *out of the east*, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:27). The “kings of the east” are exactly the same as the armies of heaven in Revelation 19 who triumph over “the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies” (Verse 19). God’s glory was described by Ezekiel as coming from the east. “He brought me to the gate ... that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east ... and the earth shined with his glory” (Ezekiel 43:1, 2).

John revealed the breathtaking majesty of Christ leading the armies of heaven to make war. “And the *armies* which were in heaven followed him upon white horses ... And he hath on his vesture and his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:14, 16). What a picture! The kings of the east riding forth against “the kings of the earth” and of the whole world. Spiritual Babylon and all the forces who followed her are destroyed by the King of kings who shall reign forever and ever.

Cyrus, the man from the east, who saved literal Israel from the hands of ancient Babylon, was a type of the “kings of the east” who would save spiritual Israel from Babylon. Just as Cyrus was called the “anointed one” and “the righteous man,” so Jesus was designated by the same titles.

By now we can easily conclude that the second coming of Christ is really the only hope of Israel. God and Christ, the true Kings of the east, will burst upon this world at the midnight of man’s extremity. When the mark of the beast is being enforced and every human plan of escape has dissolved, God’s faithful ones will be snatched from certain death.

9 ALL EYES ON THE EAST

What a tragedy that millions of Christians are looking in the wrong direction and expecting events to transpire that can never take place. Their eyes are fixed on the east all right, but on the Middle East where hate-filled sons of Abraham try to destroy each other with American and Soviet weaponry. What kind of travesty it would be to expect those political planners and militarists to fulfill the beautiful predictions of Isaiah’s “lion and lamb” world of peace.

True it is that, for a moment, Isaac and Ishmael may stop fighting. It is also true that one of the signers of the agreement is called Israel. But let no one still cling to the empty hope that this Israel has anything to do with God’s true people. They have been replaced by another nation, obedient and faithful—who have come from every kindred, tongue and people. They are the true Israel. They will never take up arms to fight anyone. They will live as Jesus lived and choose death before dishonor.

The frail confederacy of peace signed March 26, 1979, would be less than futile, even if national Israel were still the chosen people of God. Years ago a similar alliance was formed and God appraised it in these words: “Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. ... For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose. ... This is a rebellious people, children

that will not hear the law of the Lord" (Isaiah 30:3, 7, 9).

God is looking for those who will trust in right instead of might. To such He will provide deliverance from every enemy through the conquering kings of the east. Let us take our eyes away from the oil fields and political intrigues of the east and fix them on the eastern skies, because it is from there that our true allies will save us.

10 CLOTHED FOR ARMAGEDDON

Now we have been able to harmonize all the verses of Revelation 16:12-16 except that strange verse 15, which appears to be completely out of context with all the others. Why did the Holy Spirit inspire the placing of such a verse in the setting of Armageddon? "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Then follow the words, "And he gathered them together into a place called ... Armageddon."

What do proper clothes have to do with preparation for the approaching contest between Christ and Satan? And why is the wardrobe important for the ones waiting for Jesus to come? Revelation 19:7, 8 gives the surprising answer: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be *arrayed in fine linen*, clean and white: for *the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*." Like a searchlight these words illuminate the meaning of Revelation 16:15. Those garments symbolize the righteousness of Christ with which every soul must be arrayed who would be ready to meet the Lord. The battle of Armageddon will be fought over the issue of Christ's righteousness. Only those who have trusted completely in the merits of Christ's sinless life and atoning death can triumph with Him over the forces of evil. "And they overcame him by *the blood of the lamb*, and by *the word of their testimony*; and they *loved not their lives unto the death*" (Revelation 12:11).

Here is the winning combination which finally will cast down the accuser of the brethren. The saints gained the victory by their simple faith in the sufficiency of the cross. No confidence in the flesh. No faith in the works of the law to justify. His merits alone to cleanse and to empower. So the combination is threefold: 1) faith in the righteousness of Jesus, 2) fearless sharing of the "word of their testimony," and 3) "they loved not their lives unto the death." In other words, they would rather die than sin.

When the cross has done this to a person, he can survive all the concentrated attacks of a thousand Armageddon's. Demons, fallen angels and Satan himself must flee in terror before the authority of a Christ-filled life. True faith produces full obedience, and therefore, true righteousness by faith includes sanctification as well as justification. Those who would lay down their lives in death rather than disobey God will be the only ones who will refuse the mark of the beast.

Multitudes, with something less than true righteousness by faith, will not feel that obedience to all the commandments is worth dying for. Many will reason that Christ's obedience has been imputed to them, and therefore they need not be concerned about the works of the law. Such do not understand the full gospel. It is the "power of God unto salvation"—not just forgiving power, but keeping power. We are not just saved from the guilt of sin, but from the sin itself.

So Armageddon and preparation to meet Christ focus on a personal relationship with the Saviour. Clothed in the armor of His righteousness, the saints will prevail even in the face of a death decree. If you do not have the sweet assurance of that spiritual protection now, put on His robe this very moment. Woven in the loom of heaven, it contains no thread of human devising. Shattering the authority of sin in the life, it claims the merits and the *power* of Christ's life and atoning death. May this be your experience today.