

Is the World Prepar- ed for the Field of Armageddon? :: ::

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"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."—Rev. 16:14.

There are two parties contending for supremacy over this world, Jesus and Satan. In this apocalyptic vision there is presented a brief but comprehensive summary of this conflict, with its ultimate issue in the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness. The aggressive work of Christ is presented in what might be called three series of moving pictures. These are the opening of the roll sealed with seven seals, the sounding of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven bowls of divine wrath. Each series traces the course of a divine action from the beginning

up to the grand consummation, according to its special purpose. The first series presents the general plan of conquest and is personally conducted by the Redeemer. The two series following mark two specific lines of action followed by Christ in His conquest of the world. The trumpet series presents the afflictive providences of God on the one hand; the gospel of salvation on the other, seeking to lead men and nations to repentance. This purpose is indicated by the way the series is introduced.

The angel of intercession came to the golden altar with much incense and with the prayers of all saints and offered them unto God. The smoke of the offering ascended up before God, signifying that these prayers were accepted in heaven and that the trumpet series would have a successful issue. The close indicates this same purpose of reformation. When the seventh angel had sounded the joyful announcement pealed forth, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ." The bowl series presents only the judicial side of the divine administration of government, in the removal of those institutions and parties which would not yield to the preceding reformatory instrumentalities. There is a parallelism between the three instrumentalities employed by Christ and those used by Satan. The number three is the symbol of the Divine. So Satan as the would-be usurper of divine prerogatives, like Jesus, employed three agencies to oppose his antagonist and to make his own reign over the world secure. These three unclean spirits are the devil's agents, employed to work out his purpose in this world. It is one characteristic of Jesus's reign that He makes the efforts of His enemies work out His own plans. Though these evil spirits were sent to frustrate His work, they actually became instrumental in fulfilling His plans. Their evil work gathers the kings of the earth and the whole world to the field of Armageddon, where the Redeemer crushes His foes. The place, Armageddon,

is not to be taken literally. That historic field points in symbol to a coming conflict of world-wide proportions and to a victory of corresponding magnitude for the cause of truth. The word for battle is properly rendered in the Revised Bible, war; this implies a more protracted struggle.

The question most commonly asked these days is, has the hour struck for that struggle to begin? Is the world-wide war now raging, the decisive conflict prophesied for the field of Armageddon? Light may be thrown upon that question by examining the work done by these three agencies of satan, for the world is to be prepared for that field through their ministrations. Have these three agencies of satan completed the mobilization of the kings of the earth and of the whole world on that decisive field? Is the world ripe for that fearful visitation, which He is destined to inflict, "Who hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written King of Kings and Lord of Lords?" The reply will come from certain quarters, "the world is better to-day than at any time in its history." In a certain sense that is correct, but we must bear in mind that guilt is not determined simply by degeneracy, but also by rejected opportunity. This thought will come up farther on.

To answer this question whether or not the world is prepared for the field of Armageddon, we will look at the work done by these three agencies of the evil one. There is the satanic spirit of hatred of divine authority abroad in the world.

The first evil spirit mentioned came from the mouth of the dragon. John tells us that he is "that old serpent, called the devil, and satan, which deceiveth the whole world." As here employed, the dragon is the symbol of the devil in his relation to the wicked powers of this world, whether civil or ecclesiastical. This member of the satanic trinity sustains the same relation to the two following, as the first mentioned here of the divine series does to the following ones. The beast and false

prophet supply the immediate instruments by which the work of satan is carried forward. After the devil's decisive defeat, by our Lord's successful completion of His redemptive work on earth and His return to His Father, he is represented as being "cast unto the earth" and as "having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." In this spirit of hatred and malice he bends all his energy to create insubordination and thus to defeat Christ's work of love. By so doing the devil seeks for himself the supremacy over earth which Jesus had rightfully won by His redemptive work. In his second Psalm, the writer had a vision of this world as it had been learned by this evil spirit of the dragon. He saw men in their individual and organized relations proposing to discard the authority of their rightful Lord. "Why do the nations rage and the peoples meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against Jehovah and against His anointed, saying, let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us." The work of this evil spirit is fundamental because it prepares the way for the two unclean spirits following. The immediate consequences of this agent's work has been (1) to blight the welfare of humanity; (2) to poison the fountain of life and to sow discord throughout the world. The strife among men and nations by which so much blood has been shed and so much wretchedness inflicted on mankind has its source in this spirit of insubordination to the authority of Jesus, the world's King. As the writer of that Psalm indicates, it is in vain for the nations to try to escape the authority of this King. "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies," is fulfilled in the calamities which overtake the rebellious nations. To-day it is not difficult to see the hand of the Almighty as He vexes them in His sore displeasure. Will He lay aside the rod before they yield submission to His authority?

There is the dominant spirit of materialism abroad in the world. The second spirit of evil

came from the mouth of the beast, which is the symbol of what is earthly, sensual, grovelling, selfish and cruel; especially at these things find their expression in the civil and ecclesiastical spheres. Man is a member of both the animal and spiritual kingdom. His spiritual nature is made in the likeness of God and is intended to govern the lower. His animal nature rebels against this control by the higher and seeks to usurp the supremacy. When this lower nature rules in the realm of civil government we have what the Bible terms the "beast"; a government selfish, cruel and grovelling, recognizing no higher law than force. "Might makes right" with such a power. Success in material things is commendable in the individual and in organized society as well. God has made that the medium in which the higher and better things are to be wrought out. It is when they make the material their ultimate aim, when they make the world their god that they are degraded to the level of the beast. Most of the governments of earth in the early days were dominated by the ruler and more bestial traits of the animal nature. In later times the more refined elements have the ascendancy, yet the animal nature unmistakably is upon the throne. As a consequence animal methods of adjudicating conflicting interests are employed.

Selfishness, another characteristic feature of the beast, has been a distinguishing feature of national life. There have been notable exceptions to this, but the charge in general holds true. The law of Christ which is as binding upon nations as individuals and as needful, places proper limitations upon their activities. It protects the rights of the weaker parties. The supremacy of Christ is the only condition that can guarantee peace to this world.

The interests of various nations must come into conflict sooner or later. Some have large schemes of expansion, but there are smaller nations blocking their paths of progress. The animal principle of selfishness says, devour

them. This is what brought on the present conflict. A noted German scholar accounted for this war in one sentence, "It had to be and might as well come now as later." From his viewpoint he was correct. If the selfish nature is to rule, the conflict was irrepressable. It was the logic of history, detracted by the laws of selfishness. The recognition of Jesus upon the throne, whose law protects the rights of the weaker member, alone could have averted it. This agent of satan has done his work well, in preparing the nations for the harvest which is certain to come to them which selfishly worship at the shrine of the god mammon. Cruelty is another distinguishing characteristic of the animal nature. This trait follows as a consequence of the two preceding ones. The carnal and selfish nature knows no pity. The beast of prey, when hungry, devours without mercy. The underlying cause of all the bloody strife, which has afflicted humanity is, that man's higher nature guided by an enlightened conscience has been dethroned in civil affairs by his lower self. Cruelty is an attribute of the god mammon. If you wish proof of this, ask Armenia, Belgium, France and the Lusitania and other victims. The world is to-day reaping the legitimate harvest of the seed sown by this agency of satan which has persuaded men that civil government should operate only in the realm of the materialistic.

Irreligious intellectualism is the third evil spirit, preparing the world for Armageddon. This agency came out of the mouth of the false prophet. The latter appears here for the first time, but is identical with the second beast, which John saw rising out of the earth. The first beast arose out of the sea and symbolized the less perfectly organized kingdoms. The second arising out of the earth was the symbol of kingdoms in their firmly organized and civilized state. He had the appearance of a lamb with two horns, but his voice was that of the dragon. He had a veneration of Christianity, but in reality was under the rule of

the god of this world. He represents partially christianized governments, as found in the greater part of the Christian dispensation. This' beast had two horns, symbols of power, civil and ecclesiastical.

Sometimes there has been the organic union of church and state, while at times no such organic union has existed, but there has been their union of influence for evil. The change of name from second beast, to false prophet, is significant. In the latter part of the Christian dispensation the intellectual character of this agent has become so prominent that the title beast would be a misnomer. As John saw him at his origin, he had a veneration of Christianity, but the evident principle was the bestial. Near the end the intellectual had gained the ascendancy. He is unity, the name of teacher, though at heart he is false. This meets the claim of them who insist that all is going well with this world; that the degeneracy of former ages finds no place among the civilized nations of to-day. While that may be true, we are to remember that degeneracy is not the only condition that invites divine judgment. Despised opportunity as Jesus told His disciples is the final form of sin. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." That condition has well nigh been met. The mission of the prophet is to teach; prediction, being a minor part of his instruction. The spirit, which arose out of the false prophet symbolizes the wisdom of the world, used as a medium by satan for antagonizing the kingdom of Christ. It is not Christian intellectualism, but what Paul saw arising in his day to antagonize the gospel, "knowledge falsely so called." In the nineteenth century the world's eminent philosophers, teachers and scientists gave a tremendous impetus to the revival of the spirit of materialism and the consequent rejection of the spiritual and the supernatural. Herbert Spencer, Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall and a host of lesser lights have done much to give the

world a godless system of thinking. Their theory of the origin of things and of evolution apart from divine control has brought forth abundant fruit and the end is not yet. The logical outcome of the doctrine of evolution, apart from the Great First Cause is the reign of force, "the survival of the fittest." "The end justifies the means" is a familiar explanation these days of atrocious deeds, that shock humanity. The followers of the new school of thought, the so-called "advanced thinkers," ought to accept these explanations as entirely satisfactory. The Christian at work sums up in a sentence the inevitable logic of evolution. "Nature then, according to the evolutionist, teaches and authorizes us to practice lying, stealing and unbridled lust, and justifies us in so doing whenever we have the inclination, backed by the power." This teaching of the false prophet has found a wide hearing in the world, in her schools, universities and even in the church. It is not difficult to see the hand of this agent in the events of to-day.

Can we not also see in this conflict how wisdom has prepared the world for it by her wonderworking skill and lofty achievements in the arts and sciences. On land and sea the old military tactics have been superseded by the most complicated and scientific methods human ingenuity can devise. The long range guns from the great siege to the little rapid firing ones have made war most destructive of life. The different kinds of high explosive ammunition have added to the horrors of war. Then there are the liquid fire, clouds of poisonous gases and the airplanes and submarines, all new products of scientific knowledge. John speaks of these spirits as working miracles. From the viewpoint of that day to converse with another many miles distant, to send a wireless message several thousands of miles, to navigate submarines beneath the surface of the sea and destroy great ships and to fly through the air, hurling bombs to earth, destroying life and property, are miraculous. But

all these things and many other marvelous inventions of wisdom are now being used in war. Is it not a sane conclusion that these marvelous and lofty achievements of wisdom which ought to be used to bless man rather than destroy life, are perverted to this evil end under this instruction of this false teacher.

The universal character of this struggle points in the direction of its being the war of Armageddon. This is the first time a world-wide war has been fought. Civilization has linked nations together in such a way as to make this possible. Already all the great nations and many of the smaller ones are enlisted in this strife. Others are on the verge and may soon be involved. Whether the remaining so-called neutral nations enter or not, the fact is that they are all practically involved now and are suffering the consequences of the strife. These agents of satan were sent unto "the kings of the earth and of this whole world to gather them to the war of that great day of God Almighty." There is a general impression throughout the world that such a war can never again take place. If so, then this conflict is the one indicated in the text.

The trend of Providence seems to indicate that the last bowl has been poured out. The struggle is called "that great day of God Almighty." A day in which His matchless wisdom and power are to be made manifest in His works of righteousness. Already He has shown how easily in His Providence the greatest political autocracy of the world can be overthrown. That of itself shows the trend of His activity at this time. There were those who sympathized with the cause of the Allies, yet were reductant to see the Russian despotism more firmly entrenched. In a few days, by the overruling providence of God that autocracy, which was one of the greatest barriers to the progress of liberty, was overthrown, we trust, to rise no more. The reign of the "unspeakable Turk" over that portion of the world to which he has been a curse so long seems to be nearing the end. The reign of the

liquor traffic, which has respected the rights of neither God nor man and which has been international in its sway, is staggering beneath the gigantic blows which are following upon it.

Then there is a general spiritual awakening throughout the world to the fact that "man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." That is, there are higher aims than material prosperity, such as our obligations to our fellow-men and to God. Then, too, this war was providentially forced upon the nations. Only one or two of them welcomed it. All the resources known to diplomacy were employed to avert it, but in vain. Our own government honestly and persistently, under great provocation strove to remain neutral, but at last was compelled in defense of its rights and in the interests of humanity to enter the conflict. The Lord evidently has a large purpose to work out in compelling us to interfere. Perhaps a personal, chastening and a mission of leadership among the other nations.

The Lord's victory at Armageddon is to prepare the world for the conquest of truth.

It is a mistake to suppose that the war of Armageddon is to reform the kingdoms of this world. The millenium is not due at its close. The pouring out of the bowls of divine wrath are strictly judicial, not reformatory. Their mission is to remove those institutions of wickedness, which have resisted all preceding means of reformation and which are barriers to the progress of liberty and righteousness. The farmer spends much time and energy clearing his field of stumps and stones. That is all negative work, in preparation for the planting of the seed. At Armageddon we may expect that the Redeemer will clear the field of such obstructions as have held back the advance of His kingdom. Already we see at least three of these against which His wrath is being specially poured out. These are militarism or war, autocracy and the liquor traffic. There are other obstacles to the progress of the kingdom. How the Lord may remove these

is not apparent, but the ease with which He is overthrowing greater obstacles should strengthen His people's faith in His ability to complete the work begun. The removal of these great barriers is what might be called the negative work of the kingdom. The positive or constructive work follows. This latter feature of building up the Master's kingdom to its completion is presented in a supplement found in the nineteenth chapter from the eleventh verse to the end of the chapter.

John saw heaven opened and One clothed with a vesture, dipped in blood. On His head were many crowns and His name was "The Word of God." He was seated upon a white horse and there followed armies, clothed in white, mounted upon white horses. Out of the mouth of the Commander goeth a sharp sword with which He should smite the nations. It is not difficult to see under this symbolism the Prince of Peace with the gospel message of salvation and His people co-operating with him.

There are those who believe that the war of Armageddon is to be a purely spiritual struggle. But it is more than that. It is to be a physical conflict first, clearing the field of certain barriers, which have cumbered the ground, then the spiritual forces complete the work. This is the construction work of the kingdom. How long it will be before this reaches its consummation has not been revealed. Evidently this latter feature of the work is so vast that no little time must elapse before the dawn of the millennial morning, when "the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord." That the progress will be more rapid, after the great powers of evil have been removed is reasonable to believe. One of the prophets beholding this day, asked in rapture, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

The things which ought to engage the attention of Christ's followers, most are the opportunities and obligations arising out of this conflict. In Russia a vast empire has been

freed from the chains of both civil and ecclesiastical despotism. These people in their necessarily chaotic state need Christian guidance in both civil and religious affairs, "lest a worse thing come unto" them. Then, too, it looks as though the Turkish power would be so restrained that that large and needy field will be opened as never before for the gospel of the kingdom.

"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

Whether or not we have correctly interpreted the meaning of this passage of Scripture, as applying to the present hour, one thing is certain, this is a "great day of God Almighty." It is a day in which is seen the helplessness of men, when God "speaks unto them in His wrath." The wisest, most carefully prepared plans, the most thorough equipment, it is possible for men to make, avail nothing, when Jehovah frowns upon them. It has been made evident that if the nations of the earth are to dwell at peace with each other, it must be on a different basis than that on which they have rested hitherto. The need of the recognition of the authority of the Prince of Peace whose law requires nations to respect the rights of others and prescribes the rules by which their relations with each other must be directed, is the lesson of the hour. God has demonstrated both His matchless wisdom and His irresistible power in dealing with the kingdoms of the earth to-day. He has made it evident that He counts man's wisdom as folly and his strength as weakness. The exhortation of the sacred poet, as he viewed from afar the very scenes transacted to-day is the fitting message to these distracted kingdoms:

"Now, therefore, be wise, O ye kings,
Be instructed ye judges, of the earth.
Serve Jehovah with fear and rejoice with
trembling.
Kiss the Son lest He be angry and ye perish
in the way.
For His wrath will soon be kindled,
Blessed are all they that take refuge in Him."