

ARMAGEDDON: EARTH'S LAST BATTLE

First in 1990 and then again in 2003, the United States and its allies invaded Iraq. In both cases, as the armies marched towards Baghdad, many Christians were convinced that these wars were part of end-time Bible prophecy. Articles and websites predicted that these conflicts would lead directly to the final battle of Armageddon.

For decades books and articles have pointed to the Middle East as the focus of end-time prophecy. Question: Why are so many Christians focusing on the Middle East, on Israel and Iraq? Is this where we should be focusing our attention or are we in danger of being drawn into a final deception by Satan?

KEY POINTS

Let's start to answer this by first focusing on the children of Israel. The Jewish nation started with the special calling Abram received. "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great." (Genesis 12:1-2; 17:7) That "great nation," the "seed" of Abraham, was the nation of Israel.

Israel consisted of the descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people whom He miraculously rescued from Egypt and brought to the Promised Land. This Promised Land was to be the center of God's salvation activity in the world, and Israel was to be His special people. God told them, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6)

God also told Israel, "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself." (Deuteronomy 7:6) And again, "For thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself." (Deut. 14:2)

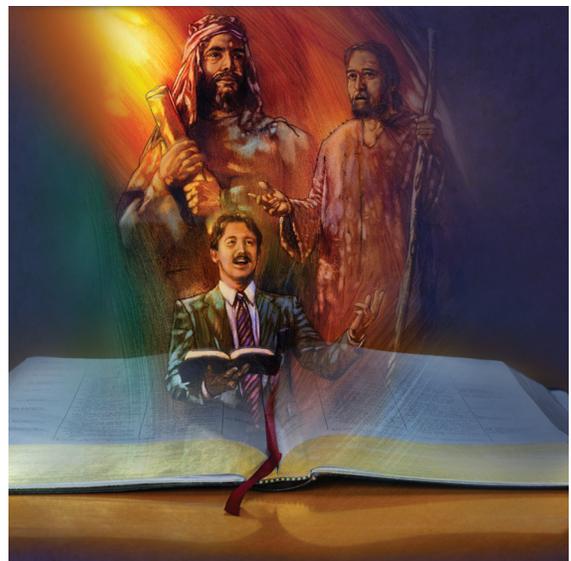
What made them a holy nation? The God whom they served! God placed them in the intersection of all the great nations to be a witness. "Have not I told thee from that time...? Ye are even my witnesses." (Isaiah 44:8) He actually wanted His temple to become a house of prayer for all people. (Isa. 56:6-7)

So, the Middle East was important at that time because God had chosen faithful Israel to tell the world about Him.

Now to New Testament times. Peter is writing to the New Testament church, which consisted of both Jews and non-Jews. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) A chosen people, priesthood, holy nation, peculiar people? This is language taken from God's description of ancient Israel. Only now, Peter is talking to the New Testament church, which was made up of Jews and Gentiles. What is going on here?



The church is God's present day Israel scattered around the world.



The Christian church was to replace the nation of Israel. All Christians, Jew and Gentile, now comprise spiritual Israel. Israel of the Old Testament failed in its assignment to witness for God. And God gave that assignment to Christians everywhere after Jesus was here. The Bible says: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29) The promises that were given to ancient Israel are now available to all of us, whether we're Jew or Gentile. If Christ has your life, you are now part of "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."



True religion is found in a life that reflects the love and character of God Himself.

Jesus even told the Jewish leaders, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matthew 21:43). True religion is found in a life that reflects the love and character of God Himself. So the promises that went to ancient Israel now belong to the Christian church around the world! So where is "spiritual Israel" located today? It's located all over the world. God's salvation activity today now centers around His church wherever it is. (Matthew 28:20) The gospel was to go world-wide.

So, what about Babylon? Isn't it in the Middle East? Yes it is, but its relevance is also spiritual and symbolic. Let's look at some of these references to Babylon:

- "And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (Revelation 17:5)
- "And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." (Revelation 14:8)

Bible scholars understand that these images and symbols are not to be understood literally. "Babylon is fallen" does not refer to the ancient city that fell 2500 years ago. It is talking about something spiritual and world-wide. Notice, Babylon makes all the nations drink "of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." This is something world-wide, not localized in the Middle East.

What does this Babylon symbolize? A look at an incident in historical Babylon of old will help us see the big picture. In the Old Testament, Babylon was this vast political and religious empire that persecuted God's people. One example of that persecution involved the enforced worship of a false god in Daniel 3 and involved three faithful Hebrew men, an image and a fiery furnace. The faithful refused to embrace false worship.

I would suggest that at the time of the end, spiritual Babylon will attempt to force the worship of its image. In our next meeting we will discuss how spiritual Babylon will attempt to do this. For now, I hope it is clear that when the New Testament talks about Babylon, it's not talking about Iraq or the Middle East. It is talking about a religious and political system that promotes doctrines that are in direct conflict with God's Word.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

The church is God's present day Israel, scattered around the world. Babylon represents those entangled with man-made doctrines and traditions. God's call to His people is: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins." (Revelation 18:2, 4) God has His faithful people in Babylon, those who have accepted non-Biblical doctrines and practices. He calls them out of confusion into His wonderful truth.

BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

At the end of time there are only two groups of people: Those content to follow the traditions of men and remain in confusion and Babylon, and those who have the faith of Jesus and keep His commandments. (Revelation 14:12)

God is calling you to "come out" of Babylon. If you haven't decided to step out by faith to unite with God's last-day commandment-keeping church that focuses on the faith of Jesus, I invite you to make that decision now. Today is the day of salvation! Jesus is coming soon!