

## Sermon – 15/06/2008 pm

### The Last Battle

Study Text: Revelation 20:7-10

In a vision Daniel saw a ram pushing west, north and south until it met with a goat (Daniel 8). In this vision the ram represented the kingdoms of Persia which overthrew the Babylonian Empire in Daniel's day. King Cyrus gave permission for the exiled Jews to return and rebuild the temple. The goat represented the kingdom of Greece. Alexander the Great marched to the east conquering all before him. Although a great figure in secular history he does not feature much in Bible history.

Alexander died at the age of 33 and his kingdom was divided among his four generals. The Seleucids ruled in the north and the Ptolemies in the south, i.e. Egypt. Towards the end of the Greek empire a Seleucid king called Antiochus Epiphanies took power. He was a vile and violent king, a king referred to in Daniel as the 'little horn'. *He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule, he shall exalt himself in his heart...he shall even rise against the prince of princes, but he shall be broken without human means* (Daniel 8:25).

In 164BC Antiochus Epiphanies attacked Jerusalem killing many Jews, defiling their temple and stopping the daily sacrifices. He symbolised the antichrist as he came from the north (Syria) to attack Jerusalem and the people of God. Some regard Gog and Magog, referred to by Ezekiel, as pointing to this same king and ultimately to the antichrist. With his armies he will attempt to destroy the church at the end of history.

### Loosed

Satan was bound and locked away for 1000 years, but after this time *must be loosed for a little while* (20:3, 7). *He will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth* – symbolism meaning 'all the nations'. He will deceive them into joining him in battle against the saints of God. This is the final assault of Satan on the church of Jesus Christ

The nations are not distant nations like China and Japan, as some think, nor does it mean a nation from the north like Russia, which is what many dispensationalists contend. *Rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2 they say is another name for Russia. They see this battle as Russia attacking the Jews and the temple in Jerusalem – well that was their interpretation before Russia lost most of its power.

In Ezekiel 38 Gog is the leader of the land of Magog who comes up against the people of Israel in the latter days. Here in Revelation both Gog and Magog are spoken of as representing nations of the earth which are deceived by Satan into gathering together for battle. As suggested, Ezekiel may have been alluding to Antiochus Epiphanies, but the picture of the nations gathering for battle against the people of God takes on a wider meaning here in Revelation. As Armageddon symbolises the place for battle because it was where Israel fought many battles, so Gog and Magog symbolise the nations which gather for battle.

The nations are subjected to a powerful deception by Satan as they gather in their hordes like the sand of the sea (20:8). This is the last battle. They surround the camp of the saints and the

beloved city. The camp reminds us of the wilderness wandering of Israel. They were a fledgling nation but in the power of God were able to strike down the nations that attacked them. The city refers to Jerusalem which was set on a hill with excellent natural defences. Still the nations joined forces to attack this city on many occasions. But it was only when God withdrew his presence from the city that it fell to the enemy.

The church is being attacked by the nations today, both overtly and covertly. The true church of Jesus Christ does not fit well in any society in the world – not with communism, not with socialism, not with monarchy, not with republicans, not with Islam and not even with secular democracy. The nations are in opposition to the church. Postmillennial hopes of a great revival and time of peace in the church are not seen in the John's vision. Rather there will be intense suffering and persecution of the saints as Satan is loosed for his final attack.

Jesus spoke about the last days saying *you will be hated by all for my names sake; but he who endures to the end will be saved. In those days there will be tribulation...and unless the Lord cut short those days no one would be saved: but for the elects sake, whom he chose, he shortened those days* (Mark 13:13f).

## Lake Of Fire

In I Kings 1 we find the prophet Elijah sitting on a hill when the king sends men to arrest him. Elijah called down fire on them and they were consumed – the captain and his fifty men. This happened a second time. On the third attempt to take Elijah the captain pleaded for his life from Elijah resolutely sitting on the top of the hill.

The end time battle in Revelation turns out to be no battle at all. The nations came and encircled the camp of the saints – and what happened? Fire came down from heaven and devoured them (20:9). That was it! The Satan inspired hordes bent on destroying the church of Christ will be consumed in fire from heaven.

Jesus told his disciples that after the tribulation the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Matthew 24:29). With the opening of the sixth seal the stars of heaven fell to earth as the wrath of the Lamb was revealed (6:13). Falling stars may be associated with this fire from heaven but we must remember this fire from heaven did not consume the saints. In the day of the Lord, writes Peter, the elements will burn up in the heat and the earth will be burned up (II Peter 3:10).

John saw Satan *thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone/sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are* (20:10). Note that the word *are* is not in the original. There is no indication of relative times in this verse. These events can be understood as occurring at the same time. 'The sense is that the punishment of the beast and the false prophet has already been described not that they were cast into the lake in an earlier battle'.

Teaching about his return in glory to judge the earth, Jesus said of those on his left *depart from me you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil, and his angels* (Matthew 25:41). John's vision is of just such a fire. He says that they, namely Satan and his cohorts, will be tormented day and night forever and ever (20:10). This is not a picture of annihilation, or of disappearing into nothingness. This is a picture of ongoing torment; of everlasting fire, as Jesus said.

There is no ambiguity about their destiny, just as there is no ambiguity about the destiny of wicked people (20:15). God does not lie. The idea that God will not in the end punish anyone in such a horrible way is wishful thinking and not what we find in the Bible. The Bible is not a fairy tale in which everyone lives happily ever after. Moreover, it is not just a story to scare people into being good. Fire and brimstone preaching is founded on the truth.

The throne of God is the ultimate answer to the problem of evil writes one scholar. The wicked may prosper in the world today. The church may be attacked and Christians suffer and be killed by evil men. But ultimately truth and righteousness will triumph. The martyrs cry out to God for their blood to be avenged, and justly so. Why would they suffer for the name Christ if, in the end, the unrepentant join them in heaven? They suffered believing in the God of grace and justice.

Jesus came the first time to give his life a ransom for many. He came full of grace and truth. The second time he comes he will come in judgment. God has set the day. Jesus will come, Satan and his cohorts will be thrown into the lake of fire, and the great white throne judgment will take place.

Are you ready for Jesus to come again? Are you ready for persecution for the name of Jesus? He will come when least expected. He will come after a time of tribulation for the church. He gathers the elect, those whose names are written in his book. But those whose names are not written in his book, those who followed Satan and bear the mark of the beast he will cast into the lake of fire. Do you understand these words? Do they impact on your life today? Are you being a watchman and sounding out the warning to a wicked generation?

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